‘LOGICALLY, I KNOW I’M NOT TO BLAME BUT I STILL FEEL TO BLAME’: EXPLORING AND MEASURING VICTIM BLAMING AND SELF-BLAME OF WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN SUBJECTED TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE

BY

JESSICA EATON

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Centre for Forensic and Criminological Psychology

School of Psychology

University of Birmingham

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Abstract

Victim blaming and self-blame are common experiences for women who have been subjected to sexual violence (Gravelin, Beirnat & Bucher, 2019). This thesis employs a comprehensive mixed-methods approach from a critical realist feminist epistemology. Chapter one introduces victim blaming and self-blame of women, including rationale for the language and terminology used in this thesis. Chapter two presents a review of the literature of victim blaming of women and chapter three sets out the methodology of the thesis. Chapter four presents the exploration and initial development of a new measure of victim Blaming of Women Subjected to Sexual Violence and Abuse (BOWSVA Scale). Chapter five and six present two qualitative studies exploring the language used to construct the victim blaming and self-blame of women, the first study from the perspective of women subjected to sexual violence and the second from the perspective of professionals who work in sexual violence support. The three studies result in a final discussion proposing a new integrated model of victim blaming of women and further findings about the victim blaming of women in society, self-blame of women after sexual violence and the way language constructs the blame of women.

Dedication

To all the women who took part in this research.

To all the women and girls who have been subjected to violence and abuse.

To all the women and girls growing up in a society that blames them for male violence.

To all the women and girls wrestling with the feeling that they were in some way to blame for what someone else did to them.

To all the women and girls who were told to change their character, behaviour, appearance or lifestyle after they were raped or abused.

To all the activists, feminists, whistleblowers, researchers and professionals who work tirelessly to challenge the institutional blaming and pathologisation of women and girls.

We all deserve a world in which rape and abuse of women and girls does not happen. But until then, the least we can do is stop blaming them and offer our unconditional support.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Victim blaming and self-blame

'Victim blaming', defined as the transference of blame from the perpetrator of a crime to the victim, was first coined by William Ryan (1971). Ryan used the original term 'blaming the victim' to argue that shifting blame towards Black people in the US was justifying racism and violence towards Black communities. This came after the Moynihan Report (1965) blamed poverty and racism on Black family life, stereotypes of single mothers, absent fathers and lower levels of education. Ryan argued that Moynihan was blaming Black communities for being subjected to racism and oppression perpetrated against them by white people.

Victim blaming is therefore not unique to sexual violence or to women, but the way in which women are blamed for sexual violence perpetrated against them by men has become a central feature of victim blaming literature. In sexual violence against women, victim blaming includes the blaming of the womans' character, behaviour, appearance, decisions or situation for being subjected to sexual violence, rather than the attribution of blame towards the male offender who committed the act (Burt, 1980). Messages of victim blaming have been found in the mass media, law, education, religion and cultural norms (American Psychological Association (APA), 2007b; Campbell & Raja, 2005; Donde et al., 2018; Franiuk et al., 2008b; Loughlan et al., 2013; Sleath, 2011; Turrell & Thomas, 2008).

'Self-blame' is defined as a cognitive process of attribution that tends to be defined based on two categories: behavioural self-blame and characterological self-blame (Janoff-Bulman, 1979). 'Behavioural self-blame' is the attribution of undeserved blame to self, based on behaviour or action. This type of self-blame leads to people

considering how different behaviours or actions could have protected them or stopped the event from happening. ‘Characterological self-blame’ is the attribution of undeserved blame to self, based on internal character or personality. This type of self-blame leads to people believing that there is something internally or personally wrong with them that caused the event to happen (Janoff-Bulman, 1979).

Self-blame is also not unique to sexual violence, but studies have found that when women experience victim blaming or negative reactions when they disclose sexual violence, they are more likely to blame themselves (Mason et al., 2008; Ullman, 1996a; Ullman, 2000). Further, existing research suggests that women use the messages they receive from society and support networks to measure whether they think someone will blame them for sexual violence and to assess whether the rape, sexual assault or abuse was their fault (Campbell et al., 2001; Ullman, 1999).

The prevalence and impact of victim blaming and self-blame

The prevalence of victim blaming of women subjected to sexual violence has varied in studies that are situated in different points in time, locations and cultures. Historic studies found that over half of participants blamed rape on the woman being promiscuous or having a bad reputation (Burt, 1980), but more contemporary studies have not presented a change in victim blaming attitudes. In 2011, McMahon and Farmer found that 53% of university students agreed that the actions of a woman led to her being raped and in 2017, the Fawcett Society conducted a large UK study of over 8000 adults and found that 34% of women and 38% of men agreed that women are at least partially to blame if they are raped or assaulted. As such, the prevalence of victim blaming is still a concern worthy of understanding.

The impact of victim blaming can be seen across many systems; and it has a profound impact on the women subjected to sexual violence (Bryant-Davis et al., 2011; Campbell et al., 2009; Campbell et al., 2001; Campbell and Raja, 2005; Franiuk & Shain, 2011; Gabbiadini et al. 2016; Kalra & Bhugra, 2013; Layden, 2010; Loughnan et al., 2013; Maier, 2008; Relyea & Ullman, 2015; Sleath, 2011; Turrell & Thomas, 2008; Ullman, 2010). These impacts will be explored and discussed throughout the thesis.

The use of terminology in this thesis

Sexual violence

The review of literature in this topic area (presented in chapter 2) identified a variation in language used not only to describe sexual violence but also to describe someone who has been subjected to sexual violence. For clarity, this review will use the term ‘women subjected to sexual violence’, to position the woman as subjected to a crime and in consideration of the different terminologies presented by feminist researchers (Kahn et al., 2003). There is some discussion about the linguistics and discourse surrounding sexual violence, resulting in the term ‘sexual assault’ being criticised for being too broad (Heath et al., 2011; McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2011) and the term ‘rape’ being found to be too emotive and limited to fully encompass the perceptions and experiences of rape as understood by women (Heath et al., 2011); this includes women who have experienced what would be legally defined as rape but do not agree or acknowledge that what happened was rape as it does not fit their script or stereotype of a rape (Donde et al., 2018; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004).

Within the thesis, the term sexual violence will be employed, with the use of the terms rape and sexual assault being used when they are specific to a previous study

or theory. The role of this language when developing questionnaires and communication with participants will be examined later on in this review, and throughout the thesis, to consider how to improve future research and whether language has an effect on findings.

Blame and Self-blame

There is debate surrounding the use of language and concepts of blame. Shaver and Drown (1986) argued that the concepts of blame, causality and responsibility have often been treated as the same thing or have been mixed together which may have been detrimental to the methodology and interpretation of findings in studies where the three concepts were not treated separately. Shaver and Drown (1986) supported the arguments of Critchlow et al. (1985) and Heider (1958) by reporting that when participants were asked to attribute blame, responsibility and causality to a variety of different actors and situations, responsibility was always attributed more than blame and causality. Shaver (1985) argued that most self-blame research had not truly been measuring blame or self-blame and added that what Janoff-Bulman (1979) had previously categorised as characterological blame and behavioural blame were in fact attributions of causality and responsibility, respectively. Finally, a comment made by Shaver and Drown (1986) shows consideration for the way language is used in the questions or stimuli with participants. It is posed that even when ‘caused’ and ‘was responsible for’ are held as equivalents, neither adequately describe blaming or self-blame, (p.698). To take these criticisms into account, this thesis will focus on the attribution of ‘blame’, and will avoid the conflation with responsibility, fault and cause - but also take into consideration that many previous studies in this field have the language consistency issues pointed out by Shaver and Drown (1986).

Victims and Survivors

There is also considerable debate around the way that women are described following sexual assault (see Williams & Serna (2017), for a discussion). Some have argued that the 'victim' label is disempowering and focusses on the negative experience and consequences; that it sounds static and does not aid recovery or wellbeing for the woman (Dunn, 2005; Hunter, 2010). Many have proposed that changing the language to 'rape survivor' empowers the woman in the literature, is more future-focussed and elicits less blame responses than 'victim' (e.g., Dunn, 2005; RAINN, 2009). However, in a systematic literature review that focussed on the difference between the two common labels, Hockett & Saucier (2015) took a less dichotomous view of the labels given to and used by women subjected to sexual violence. The review cited feminist work by Lugones (2003) who wrote that women's realities were more complicated than the distinction between the dichotomous labels and in line with the feminist humanist perspective, argued that women often identified as one of the labels, the other, both or neither. In response to these findings, this thesis will not refer to women as either 'rape victims' or 'rape survivors' but rather the phrase 'women who have been subjected to sexual violence'. The use of the word 'subjected' instead of a more neutral term such as 'experienced' is deliberate in this thesis and serves to position the offender and the crime within the language – rather than the use of the word 'experienced' which does not identify a perpetrator or cause of the sexual violence.

With this in mind, this thesis begins with the review of the existing literature pertaining to victim blaming and self-blame of women subjected to all forms of sexual violence.

Chapter 2: Review of the literature

This literature review is presented in three sections. The first section considers the most common theories of victim blaming and self-blame. The second section uses Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model (1979) to explore the factors at each level of the system that may relate to victim blaming and self-blame of women subjected to sexual violence. The third section discusses the measurement of victim blaming in previous studies. A thorough exploration of the available literature was conducted periodically between 2015 and 2018 to provide evidence of the factors known to be related to victim blaming and self-blame of women. Details of the literature searches and results can be found in Appendix 1.

The aim of the literature review presented here is to find and collate all available theories, peer reviewed evidence and relevant findings to the psychology of victim blaming of women subjected to sexual violence. Rather than conducting a systematic literature review in which the data and methodology of previous empirical studies could be scrutinised for a specific purpose, this literature review seeks to synthesise theories, qualitative and quantitative study findings across several decades to explore the current understanding of victim blaming. In doing so, this chapter presents a literature review which is more conceptual, than systematic (Grant & Booth, 2009).

Whilst this literature review does include an exploration of culture, religion and international literature; the literature was all written in English, submitted to journals and publications written in English and many of the studies come from Western

populations. Therefore, the evidence presented here is culturally situated and limited.

Theories of victim blaming

Rape myth acceptance (RMA)

Brownmiller (1975) and Burt (1980) defined a rape myth as a set of persistent and widespread beliefs and attitudes held about rape, despite them being false, that contribute to the hostility towards victims and ultimately, victim blaming. Rape myths include beliefs about the victim's character, appearance and behaviour, the motivations and behaviour of the offender and the situational factors surrounding the offence such as the time of day, area, method and impact on the victim (Burt, 1980; Brownmiller, 1975; Sleath, 2011). In early work, Burt (1980) presented that over half of respondents agreed with the item 'In the majority of rapes, the victim was promiscuous or had a bad reputation'. The same proportion of respondents agreed that '50% or more of rapes are only reported as rape because the woman is trying to get back at the man she was angry with or was trying to cover up an illegitimate pregnancy'. As the measurement of rape myth acceptance (RMA) developed, Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald (1999) presented the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMAS) which further categorized rape myths into seven main types of female rape myth: 1) 'she asked for it'; 2) 'it wasn't really rape'; 3) 'he didn't mean to'; 4) 'she wanted it'; 5) 'she liked it'; 6) 'rape is a trivial event'; and 7) 'rape is a deviant event'. In 2011, McMahon & Farmer updated the IRMAS to present four types of rape myths about women: 1) 'she asked for it'; 2) 'he didn't mean to'; 3) 'it wasn't really rape' and 4) 'she lied'.

The acceptance of societal myths surrounding rape has been shown to increase blaming of the victim for their experiences, by positioning women as the cause of rape (Frese et al., 2004; Golge et al., 2003; Sleath, 2011).

Johnson (1997) found that a significantly higher proportion of men than women endorsed rape myths that stated that most rapes could be prevented if women didn't provoke them and if women didn't secretly want to be raped (Sleath, 2011). More recent studies found that a third of the UK general public sample believed a woman was to blame if she was raped whilst drunk, believed that a woman behaving in a flirtatious way was responsible for being raped and believed that a woman was responsible for being raped if she failed to say 'no' clearly enough (Amnesty International, 2005). A drop from a half to a third could be presented as a significant decrease in acceptance from the eighties and Vonderhaar & Carmody (2015) have suggested that such a drop is due to an increase in education and an increase in awareness of rape and sexual assault. However, in a study in which undergraduate students gave feedback on the IRMAS items and suggested changes to update the items and make them more realistic, McMahon and Farmer (2011) found that 53% of the students agreed that the actions of the woman led to her being raped. In the UK, The Fawcett Society (2017) found that 34% of women and 38% of men agreed that women are at least partially to blame for rape.

When a number of rape myths come together (such as the victim should have injuries, the victim was attacked by a stranger, the victim did not do anything to cause the assault, the victim was not drunk and was dressed modestly, the victim immediately reported the incident) they form a false stereotypical rape against which the general public, authorities and victims themselves, compare their experiences (Kahn, Mathie, & Torgler, 1994; Ryan, 1988; Sleath, 2011). When a rape or sexual

assault experience falls outside of this stereotypical rape, it can lead to the victim being blamed or not believed at all. In fact, the greater the stereotypical belief of the observer, the more responsibility attributed to the victim and less responsibility to the perpetrator (Koppelaar, Lange, & van de Velde, 1997). This effect is also seen in women who have been subjected to rape, who use the same set of rape stereotypes to compare their own experience against to make a decision about whether to report (Campbell et al., 2011; Mont et al., 2003).

Evidence suggests that rape myths operate in different ways for different people. Men tend to use rape myths to excuse or minimise sexual violence, but women tend to use rape myths to deny their personal vulnerability (Heath et al., 2011; Sleath, 2011). Whilst many rape myths include direct victim blaming about the appearance, behaviour or character of the victim – others are focussed on broader attitudes to sexual violence, attitudes towards women as a class of people or attitudes and beliefs that excuse or sympathise with the perpetrator (Payne et al., 1999; Sleath, 2011). Therefore, not all rape myths are related to blaming women for rape.

One of the weaknesses of RMA as a theory of victim blaming has been the way RMA has been conflated with victim blaming. Whilst RMA and victim blaming of women has been shown to be strongly linked (Donde et al., 2018; Sleath, 2011), the act of attributing blame to a woman subjected to rape is not the same as accepting societal myths about rape and should not be used as a singular explanation of victim blaming (Buddy & Miller, 2011). Another weakness lies in the specificity of rape myths being only about the act of rape, whilst the victim blaming of women and girls is seen in elder abuse, child sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation, adult sexual exploitation, rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment (Bows, 2016; Eaton, 2018; Eaton & Holmes, 2017; Fawcett Society, 2017; Ullman, 2010). The assertion that

similar victim blaming messages are used against girls being sexually abused in childhood or older women being subjected to cat calling suggests that there are larger influences than rape myths that cause and maintain the victim blaming of women and girls.

Sexism and Gender Role Stereotypes

Sexism is defined as prejudice, stereotyping or discrimination based on gender (Oxford Dictionary, 2016). In addition, gender roles are defined as a set of socially constructed norms, generally derived from sexism, that dictate which behaviours and characteristics are considered acceptable or desirable based on gender (Alsop et al., 2002; Levant & Alto, 2017; West & Zimmerman, 2002). These messages and norms contribute to victim blaming and self-blame by communicating a set of expected or accepted characteristics, behaviours and stereotypes of women and of victims of rape and sexual assault (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005).

Hostile sexism is defined as overt misogynistic stereotypes and attitudes that position women as inferior to men, and used for sexual pleasure (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Lee, Fiske, & Glick, 2010). Hostile sexism contributes to victim blaming by justifying the global exploitation of women as sexual objects and men's greater tolerance of sexual harassment of women (Abrams et al., 2003; Kunst et al., 2018; Masser et al., 2006; Page et al., 2016; Russell & Trigg, 2004).

Benevolent sexism is defined as sexism which appears positive or traditional, but patronises women using traditional gender role stereotypes to position women as weaker, helpless and cherished, vulnerable (Glick & Fiske, 1996). This form of sexism has been found to elicit protection of traditional, gender role conforming

women but hostility towards non-traditional, non-gender conforming women (Bareket et al., 2018; Fowers & Fowers, 2010; Sakallı-Uğurlu, 2010, Kunst et al., 2018).

Victim blaming increases when the woman is seen as not conforming to the perceived appropriate characteristics and behaviours of a woman (Viki & Abrams, 2002; Harrison, Howerton, Secarea, & Nguyen, 2008; Kunst et al., 2018). For example, Viki & Abrams (2002) found that when the characteristics of a woman were manipulated to describe her as contradicting gender role stereotypes of a woman, she was blamed for the rape significantly more than when no information was given about her gender roles, marital or family status.

It has been recognised that some of traditional gender role characteristics of 'femininity' are contradictory. Women are expected to be submissive or passive in sex and yet simultaneously expected to control and preserve sexual activity (Simonson & Subich, 1999). Women are socialised to be emotional, nurturing and submissive to men but also responsible for limiting, causing and controlling men's sexual behaviours (Bem, 1993; Worell & Remer, 2003). Women can therefore be blamed for being submissive or passive, controlling or preserving in sex depending on the situation. Females are expected to perform an identity that is 'sexy but not a slut' (Ringrose, 2013). Duschinksy (2013) agree that desirability is acceptable in sexist society but being perceived as a 'slut' means that the woman is positioned as deserving of her rape, exploitation and commodification (Duschinsky, 2013; Klein, 2013). Dichotomous gender roles and sexism provide a foundation for victim blaming beliefs about women 'asking for it' by what they were wearing or how they were acting. Gender roles are therefore instrumental in reinforcing a male-constructed, male-serving stereotype of a woman. When these strict social, cultural and

behavioural boundaries are not conformed to, women can be positioned as to blame for sexual violence and harassment.

An example of a sexist prescription of female behaviour is the way in which women are expected to engage in ‘token resistance’ to sex due to the expectation that women are submissive and are not supposed to express interest in sexual activity (Frese et al. 2004; Sleath, 2011). Resistance is seen as a positive action on the part of the woman which contributes to a reduction in victim blaming by others (Garcia, 1998). Conversely, a woman who does not resist or fight back in a rape or sexual assault is positioned as enjoying or wanting it. Garcia (1998) conducted research to explore the perceptions of ‘token resistance’ to unwanted sexual contact. It is argued that men are socialised to believe that women who show resistance to sex are ‘playing hard to get’ (Garcia, 1998). The findings from Garcia’s study bore similarity to the victim blaming messages that insist that a woman must fight back against a perpetrator during a sexual assault or rape and that resistance increases the credibility and reduces the blame of the woman. However, the study showed that only the most extreme responses from a woman who was sexually assaulted (slapping, screaming and crying) were deemed to be ‘genuine’ resistance by men, whilst body language, non-verbal cues and saying no repeatedly was not considered to be resistance (Garcia, 1998).

Recent research has shown that victim blaming, sexual violence tolerance and hostility towards the ‘#metoo’ movement are all correlated with hostile sexism (Abrams et al., 2003; Kunst et al., 2018; Masser et al., 2006; Page et al., 2016; Russell & Trigg, 2004). Gender roles and sexism as theories of victim blaming of women are not only consistent and significant but should be seen as underpinning RMA. Indeed, many of the rape myths are supported by both hostile and benevolent

sexism, with gender role stereotypes and cultural pressures providing a fertile environment for rape myths to be developed, nurtured and communicated. Rape myths contain gender role stereotypes and sexism; and gender role stereotypes and sexism reinforce RMA (Sleath, 2011).

Belief in a Just World (BJW)

Lerner's (1980) Belief in a Just World (BJW) theorises that people hold beliefs that the world is a just place in which good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people – meaning everyone gets what they deserve. Whilst heavily cited in the victim blaming literature, it has contributed contradictory findings when applying the theory to sexual assault and rape victims (Kunst et al, 2018; Pinciotti & Orcutt, 2017; Sleath, 2011; Sleath & Woodhams, 2014). Despite there being some cultural differences across the world in the endorsement of BJW, this type of reasoning is present in many cultures and religions.

The benefit of employing the BJW in everyday life relates directly to sexual victimisation. The belief buffers against the reality that horrible things can happen to anybody at any given time, without reason or logic (Furnham, 2003). It is suggested that this benefit transforms from a psychological, protective 'buffer' to a path of non-rational reasoning that when applied to real life events like the rape of a person, the observer may conclude that they must have done something to deserve or prompt the event for it to have happened to them (Correia, Vala & Aguiar, 2001). The second benefit, is that this reassures the observer with the BJW that it is highly unlikely to happen to them if they just keep living a good life and do not do anything to 'invite' the rape or sexual assault (which is arguably where this theory comfortably interlinks with rape myths about characteristics and circumstances causing or

encouraging rape and sexual assault). Whilst this reasoning seems over-simplified or even ‘astonishingly crude’ as Williams (2003, p.463) describes it, this reasoning is embedded in societal discourse. Examples from language could include ‘karma will get them in the end’, ‘what goes around comes around’, ‘you reap what you sow’, ‘they didn’t deserve that to happen to them’, ‘why does the worst always happen to the best people?’ ‘they’ll get their just deserts’. It appears that these examples of popular discourse are easily applied to victims of sexual violence in a way that would allow the observer to assume that events that happen in a person’s life are either deserved or undeserved and this may prompt the observer to look for factors that would contribute to that reasoning process.

Correia et al. (2001) suggest that observers will initially focus on the victim’s behaviour as an explanation for the situation. In sexual violence, this could be the act of walking home alone or drinking with friends. Where this reasoning fails, and the responsibility cannot be attributed towards the victim’s behaviour, then the responsibility is attributed towards the victim’s character, which bears resemblance to the theory of fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977). In line with common rape myths, this could be the victim’s sexual history or their prior communication/relationship with the perpetrator. The point of this attribution of responsibility is supposedly to create balance and to affirm their BJW by reinterpreting the situation to make it appear just and fair. It is argued by Lerner (1980) that this is because when a ‘bad thing’ happens to a ‘good person’ it threatens the observers’ BJW. Therefore, where a victim was shown to be innocent, the observers with BJW engaged in much higher levels of victim derogation in order to restore their BJW (Correia & Vala, 2003; Crome & McCabe, 1995; Hafer, 2000; Pinciotti & Orcutt, 2017; Sleath, 2011). Importantly, Lerner (1997) proposed that

people will reason backwards when they learn that a woman has been raped and will then make assumptions or guesses about her behaviour or character to provide reasons for why she was subjected to sexual violence.

Whilst BJW has been included as a theory of victim blaming for some time, the results from psychometric measures are often inconsistent and have shown strongly correlated positive, negative and inverse relationships with victim blaming and RMA. Therefore, there appears to be a link, but how much this influences the victim blaming of women subjected to sexual violence is still unclear. It may be that BJW is not a singular explanation of victim blaming of women; it instead may be linked to other biases and values about women, sexual violence and social justice.

Individualism and self-preservation

Individualism has links to victim blaming due to the way that it encourages individual responsibility for actions and decisions. In contrast to collectivism, in which the person is viewed and views themselves as part of a larger group or collective; individualism is defined as the social theory that the person takes priority over any group or collective. They are free to act in an independent way, make their own choices and are responsible for those choices and decisions (Triandis, 1995). The theory that we are all responsible for our own safety is an extension of this (as personal safety is an action and a choice). However, the argument that all people are responsible for their own safety from harm seems to run counter to the argument that we are all responsible for our own actions. Generally, in individualistic societies, we are taught that we are all responsible for our own actions (Inglehart, 1997; Sampson, 2001; Oyserman et al., 2002). Yet with rape, the individual responsibility of choice

and decision making is shifted away from the perpetrator being responsible for their actions and towards the counter-argument, which is ‘the victim is responsible for their own safety’. This approach has recently been found to increase victim blaming and does not improve the safety of women (Jago and Christenfeld, 2018).

In a dyad conversation study about a rape of a woman on university campus, Anderson et al. (2001) found that participants said that the woman should have kept herself safer and known about the previous rapes, commenting that she was irresponsible and stupid. Individualistic reasoning moves from the perpetrator being responsible for their actions to the victim being responsible for their lack of safety. Waterman further defined that normative individualism is the focus on personal responsibility for actions and decisions which minimises the social and wider contexts (Oyserman et al., 2002). These underlying concepts of individualism provide support for victim blaming comments such as ‘she should have kept herself safe’ or ‘she should have made better choices’. Rather than supporting initiatives to prevent sexual offending, this results in others profiting from the fears of women who feel they must seek the skills to protect themselves from sex offenders by selling anti-rape knickers, anti-rape rings, anti-rape necklaces, rape alarms and anti-rape self-defence programmes. This form of victim blaming is indirect. It is not overtly saying that women deserve to be raped, but it is putting the onus on the woman to be able to physically fight off an offender, which ignores evidence indicating that the large majority of all rapes and sexual assaults are not perpetrated by strangers in unfamiliar environments using physical force (Egan, 2017; Sleath & Woodhams, 2014), and that many instinctive trauma responses include freezing and becoming unresponsive in an effort to minimise further physical harm (Moller et al., 2017).

A concept linked with individualism is self-preservation, first set out by Freud in 1913 as an ego response to protect the self. In broader terms, self-preservation is defined as a 'behaviour based on the characteristics or feelings that warn people or animals to protect themselves from difficulties or dangers' (Merriam-Webster, 2019). Self-preservation has led to humans developing personal safety rules and laws to avoid harm or death (Lyng, 1990). Specific to sexual violence and psychology, self-preservation and defence mechanisms are concepts from psychoanalytic theory, defined as being unconscious psychological mechanisms to protect the self from anxiety or something psychologically harmful (Schacter, 2011). As an act of self-preservation, people are likely to assess the differences between the characteristics and behaviours of the victim and themselves, use those differences to explain why the rape or sexual assault happened to that particular victim and reinforce their sense of self-preservation and safety (Furnham, 2003; Shaver, 1970). They may also assess the actions of the victim and then conclude that they would never perform the same actions, would never 'allow themselves' to be found in those situations and are therefore indirectly blame the victim for not being able to protect themselves (Shaver, 1970; Lerner, 1980). This provides comfort that if a person takes care of themselves and stays safe (like they have been told to do throughout their lives), they will remain safe because they will not have done anything to lead them to becoming a victim (Sleath, 2011; Furnham, 2003). This bears resemblance to the logic of the BJW (Lerner, 1980); that if you are a good person and don't do anything wrong, you will not be harmed. In self-preservation or defence mechanisms, the observer may convince themselves that they would never make the same mistakes as the victim and therefore they are invulnerable to sexual violence.

The notion of self-preservation is important when considering victim blaming because there are several official responses to sexual violence that are about teaching young girls to change their behaviours, characteristics, physical appearance, knowledge levels and emotional states in order to protect her from future sexual violence (Jago & Christenfield, 2018; Women & Equalities Committee, 2016).

It is important to note that women in individualistic cultures and collectivist cultures both suffer from victim blaming, RMA and sexism (Kalra & Bhugra, 2013). Individualism is not a singular explanation of victim blaming, however, it does seem to support victim blaming messages, sexism, BJW and rape myths about women being able to predict, manage and protect themselves against sexual violence rather than sex offenders having to control their desire to offend against the woman. This raises the question of why the same burden of personal responsibility is not applied to the sex offender in the same way it is applied to the woman who has experienced sexual violence. This question may then raise a weakness in the theory of individualism, especially if it is only being applied to the victim of sexual violence. However, this may be another example of how standalone theories are unlikely to explain victim blaming.

Kalra & Bhugra (2013) make a parallel argument about ego-centric versus socio-centric cultures and how women (and their close support network) who are members of those different cultures respond to sexual violence against women. In ego-centric cultures, as with individualism, the priority is given to the ‘self’ and achieving ‘independence’ which means that the consequences and responses of sexual violence remain with the woman, inducing feelings of private guilt. It is still common for women to be blamed for sexual violence but it is rare for the rest of her family

members and support network to be tainted by these negative judgements. By contrast, in socio-centric cultures, as with collectivism, the priority is given to the relations with others and maintaining interdependence. This means that the consequences of and responses to sexual violence are spread wider than the woman who was subjected to the violence, and therefore induces wider feelings of shame and embarrassment for the whole family and close support network (Kalra & Bhugra, 2013).

More research is required to understand the victim blaming of women in individualistic and collectivist cultures, especially as the research suggests that whilst victim blaming impacts women differently depending on whether their culture is individualist or collectivist, it remains prevalent regardless of the role of the individual in each culture.

Attribution theories

These theories are concerned with the way people explain the causes of events or behaviours. Heider (1958) argued that all people were naïve psychologists trying to make sense of the world and look for causal relationships for the things they observe and experience – even when there is not a cause. Heider (1958) proposed that humans had a cognitive bias towards attribution in which they would explain the behaviour or experiences of others using internal explanations, but explain their own behaviour or experiences using external explanations. Later on, Ross (1977) termed this phenomenon ‘fundamental attribution error’ and is also known as the ‘actor-observer bias'. The error in attribution relates to victim blaming as it prioritises the characteristics or behaviours of the woman for rape and sexual violence, rather than

prioritising the external forces such as the behaviours and motivations of the sex offender. However, this has more recently been contested when a meta-analysis of 173 studies exploring the actor-observer bias showed that there were differing effect sizes for the asymmetry in attribution between the actor and observer in different situations (Malle, 2006). Whilst this is important, it must be noted that the studies were not specific to sexual violence, and due to the other interlinking societal factors and stereotypes surrounding sexual violence, the actor-observer bias may be different to general events.

Additionally, if the actor-observer bias was applied to women who were subjected to sexual violence, it should mean that women would not blame themselves using characterological or behavioural reasoning. It should instead mean that women would always attribute the sexual violence to external forces (as in the actor-observer bias) – but this runs counter to all of the evidence in the self-blame literature, which finds that women often blame themselves, their behaviours, their character or their choices (Ullman, 1996; 1998; 2001; 2010). Clearly, there is a partially inverted effect in fundamental attribution error in sexual violence in which the external observer does attribute internal reasons for the event, but so does the actor. In sexual violence, this means that the observer is likely to blame the woman's behaviour, character or appearance – but so is the woman who was subjected to the sexual violence. This is an important finding as it raises questions about why this bias changes in sexual violence.

Also relevant to victim blaming, is the defensive attribution hypothesis (Shaver, 1970). The hypothesis stated that the level of blame put on the victim depends on observers' perceived similarity and identification with the victim: when victim and observer are increasingly similar, (the same sex or ethnicity, for example) the victim

will be blamed less (Grubb & Harrower, 2008). Research by Fulero & DeLara (1976) showed that female students blamed the victim least when they were perceived to be similar and blamed the victim most when they were perceived to be dissimilar to the victim. This finding could be applied to the family and friends of a woman subjected to sexual violence as they would arguably perceive a high level of identification to the woman (Perilloux et al., 2014) . However, in some studies, similarity and identification with the victim did not reduce victim blaming and instead found that women who had been subjected to sexual violence blamed the victim in scenarios twice as much as women who had no personal experience of sexual violence (Carmody & Washington, 2001; Perilloux et al., 2014). This is an important finding, as the defensive attribution hypothesis would suggest that women subjected to sexual violence would have high identification and should have blamed victims less. These mixed findings may represent evidence of competing cognitive bias as when White & Rollins (1981) examined a community response to rape, they found that participant's responses were influenced less by the perceived similarity and identification to the woman in their family who was subjected to sexual violence - but more by the belief most participants had in a 'just world' (White & Rollins, 1981).

The defensive attribution hypothesis was tested by Mason et al. (2004) with participants who reported being a victim of sexual violence and participants with no identified history of sexual violence. Mason et al. (2004) found no difference in empathy or victim blaming between the two groups of participants. Further studies found no difference in RMA or victim blaming when history of sexual violence was examined (Adams-Curtis & Forbes, 2001; Carmody & Washington, 2001). Therefore, findings did not support the theory that people who were perceived as similar due to experiencing sexual assault or rape would have higher empathy and have lower

levels of victim blaming. Indeed, evidence suggests that it is common for women to experience victim blaming from the members of their closest support networks, from people who they identify with and from other victims (Ullman & Vasquez, 2015; White & Rollins, 1981).

Counterfactual thinking and perceived control

Counterfactual thinking is the theory that suggests people naturally examine and critique their behaviour, experiences and possible reasons for their trauma which can often lead to women engaging in 'if only' thought processes that convince them that their experience may not have happened or would have ended differently had they done something different (Gavanski et al., 1993; Kahneman & Miller, 1986; Miller et al., 2010; Roese, 1997). It has been proposed that the function of this thinking is to identify what behaviours, errors or actions supposedly led to the sexual violence to avoid making the same mistakes again in the future (Miller et al., 2010), which therefore contains high levels of self-blame. Examples given include a mixture of counterfactual thinking and gender roles stereotypes which led to thoughts such as questioning whether she was too trusting, whether she looked too provocative, whether she caused the rape due to her decisions or behaviours (Miller et al, 2010). Branscombe et al. (2003) reported that counterfactual thoughts following their sexual assault directly predicted self-blame and poor psychological well-being in women.

Their study found that when participants were asked closed questions about what they could have done differently to avoid being sexually assaulted, 90% of participants gave answers based in counterfactual thoughts. However, this was criticised by Miller et al. (2010) who chose to use open ended questions that did not direct the women to think about what they could have done differently. Despite this,

both studies found that counterfactual thinking predicted lower self-esteem, poorer psychological wellbeing and higher self-blame (Miller et al., 2007).

Miller et al. (2010) concluded that these thought processes lead to future vulnerability, a perceived lack of control and a perception of inevitability of sexual violence. Self-blame may have a relationship with feelings of control, as Janoff-Bulman (1979) originally theorised that self-blame may be an adaptive coping mechanism to blame behaviours and actions. Blaming behaviours and actions were argued to decrease the belief of bad things happening by chance, and to increase wellbeing by blaming the event on controllable personal behaviours that could be changed in the future. However, more recent studies focussing on domestic and sexual abuse have not supported this assertion, with one study finding that there was no relationship between characterological and behavioural blame and perceived control over the event (O'Neill & Kerig, 2000) and another finding that behavioural self-blame had a negative impact on the person, including making changes to their lives, withdrawing from social interactions and avoidance (Frazier et al., 2005). Overall, more contemporary research has argued that counterfactual thinking and self-blame to try to regain perceived control over the sexual violence has resulted in reduced wellbeing (Branscombe et al., 2003; Balzarotti et al., 2016).

In summary, theories of victim blaming and self-blame have been examined for decades, but researchers have not yet achieved an integrated approach to all of the theories and factors that cause, influence, increase or maintain victim blaming. Often, authors have attempted a singular explanation of victim blaming and where multiple explanations have been explored, it has been with measures of RMA, hostile sexism and BJW. The research findings have been shown to be inconsistent and nuanced, suggesting there is more to victim blaming than singular explanations.

Many theories would benefit from wider social and feminist explanations of victim blaming of women as a specific class of people who exist within a broad system of oppression, stereotyping and objectification. Each of the current theories explain a small part of the process of victim blaming, but if viewed together, they may offer a broader, more holistic framework to understand why women are blamed for sexual violence. In the literature, there are many of other factors that appear to influence whether and how much a woman is blamed or blames herself for sexual violence.

In line with ideas from Grauerholz (2000) and Messman-Moore and Long (2003), this was explored using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model (1979;1986) as a structure to search for factors that contribute to the victim blaming of women subjected to sexual violence.

Sexual violence does not occur in a vacuum and should not be seen as an event that happens in social isolation (Campbell et al. 2009). This literature review will therefore utilise the structure and concept of The Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979;1986) to explore the environments and factors associated to victim blaming and self-blame.

The ecological model was first developed as a theory of human development, arguing that a person does not exist or develop in a vacuum but that multiple levels of their environment and factors within those levels influence and interact with the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

In reference to sexual violence perpetrated against women, to focus solely on the woman's character, behaviour and relationships or their age, education level, ethnicity or body type (Bronfenbrenner's 'individual level') as factors contributing to their victimisation and blame attribution would ignore the important influence that

factors in wider systems have on her experience of sexual violence and of victim blaming (Grauerholz, 2000). Focussing on the individual level factors only, would therefore perpetuate the myth that sexual violence only happens to certain types of women and could lead to practitioners, policy makers and researchers looking at ever more infinite individual characteristics, attitudes, behaviours and personalities of the victim to seek a reason for victimisation and blame.

When women are subjected to sexual violence, they may experience victim blaming from close family and friends, colleagues or their place of worship (microsystem) or from formal structures such as the criminal justice system, health services, or social services (exosystem). When women are subjected to victim blaming from family, friends and formal structures, the feeling of self-blame can increase further (Campbell et al. 2001). Further, there is the larger cultural structure that contributes to the blaming of victims in society (macrosystem). Factors at this level such as porn culture, rape myth acceptance, individualism, sexism and belief in a just world can give influential messages about women who are subjected to sexual violence and how society should respond to them.

Campbell et al. (2009) demonstrated that psychological sequelae following sexual violence is affected by factors at each one of the levels of the ecological model, therefore this approach will be utilised to explore the factors contributing to victim blaming and self-blame. Instead of using this model by beginning with the individual as embedded in the other levels and working up the levels to discuss factors, this literature review will start with the macrosystem level factors and work down to the individual to present the individual as influenced by all of the preceding factors.

Factors related to victim blaming and self-blame of women subjected to sexual violence

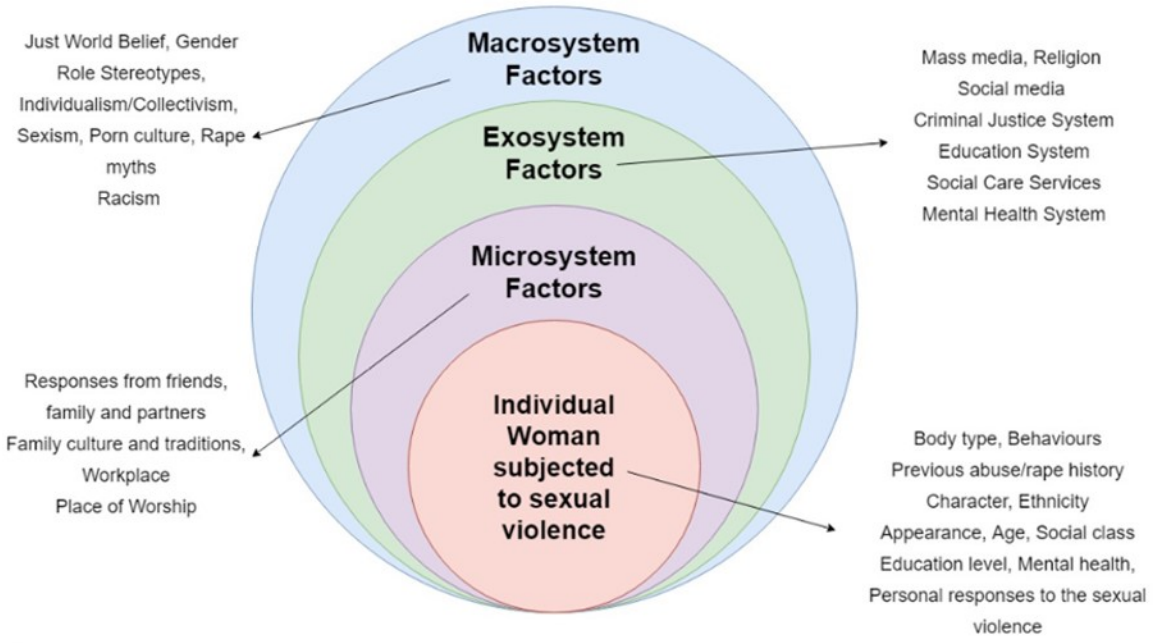

Figure 1: Ecological model of factors contributing to victim blaming of women subjected to sexual violence

There are many factors that appear to contribute to the victim blaming of women which exist at all levels of the ecological system. The sections below will note the evidence from each level, beginning with the macrosystem factors.

Macrosystem factors

At the macrosystem level, pornography and wider porn culture validates the hyper-sexualisation and objectification of women whilst simultaneously trivialising, minimising and glorifying rape and sexual assault of women (Katyachild et al., 1985; Layden, 2010). This leads to an increase in victim blaming of women or beliefs that women want to be raped and are unlikely to suffer from rape (Garcia, 1984; Loughnan et al., 2013; Ohbuchi et al., 1994; Paolucci et al., 2000; Van Maren, 2014).

Also at the macrosystem level, is the mass media and social media, both of which have been shown to be selective about the way they report violence against women (Brownmiller, 1975; Long, 2012; Shaw et al., 2009; Ward, 1995), usually resulting in an increase in victim blaming (Franiuk et al., 2008b; Loughlan et al., 2013) and an increase in storylines and media reporting focussing on racist and misogynistic (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Thomas et al., 2004) descriptions of women lying about rape or wanting to be raped (APA, 2007b; Culcanz, 2000; Magestro, 2015).

Exosystem factors

At the exosystem level of our society, the criminal justice system in its entirety has been found to increase both victim blaming of women and self-blame of women subjected to sexual violence (Campbell, 2005; 2006; Campbell & Raja, 2005; Grubb & Harrower, 2008; Kelly, 2010; Filipas & Ullman, 2006; Sleath & Bull, 2012). Often related to the 'real rape' stereotype (Williams, 1984), the blaming of women tends to come from the way police and other criminal justice agents measure the woman's character, behaviour or the situation against stereotypical beliefs about rape (Campbell, 1998; Campbell, 2005; Campbell & Raja, 2005; Field & Bienen, 1980; Krahe, 1991; Sleath, 2011). When women or the circumstances of the rape are not coherent with the 'real rape stereotype' the woman is less likely to report (Fisher et al., 2003) and less likely to be believed by police (McGregor et al., 2000; Sudderth, 1998).

Also in the exosystem, the education system has been found to be inherently misogynistic whilst providing a fertile ground for victim blaming of girls for the sexual harassment and violence they endure in their school years and school environments

(Chapman, 2015; Eaton, 2018; NSPCC, 2012; Women and Equalities Committee, 2016).

Belief in all of the major world religions has been explored as a contributory factor to victim blaming through the acceptance of rape myths, BJW and sexism (Franiuk and Shain, 2011; Muganyizi et al., 2010) – and religious belief has been shown to induce feelings of self-blame in women who have been subjected to rape and sexual assault (Bryant-Davis et al., 2011; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995). Almost all the religious influences can be reduced to two consistent factors that support victim blaming: the way women are portrayed as inferior to men or sexually manipulative towards men (Brownmiller, 1975; Turrell & Thomas, 2008; Weaver, 2007) and the way that religious teachings provide understanding of suffering in the lives of their followers, which lead to beliefs that rape only happens to bad women or women who are being taught a life lesson they must endure to become a better person (Heggen, 1996; Turrell & Thomas, 2008). In the work by Turrell & Thomas (2008) there was also consideration for the way professionals should work with women who are religious, when the victim blaming and self-blame they experience are coherent with religious messages that encourage them to self-blame, endure suffering as a rite of passage or punishment and/or forgive the rapist (Franiuk & Shain, 2011; Gross, 1994; Khuankaew, 2007).

Microsystem factors

In the microsystem, women are often blamed by their family and friends (Burgess & Holstrom, 1979; Mason et al., 2008; White & Rollins, 1981) or begin to self-blame due to the responses they received from their support network (Browne, 1991). The responses women receive from the people they care about have the biggest impact

on their well-being and their self-blame (Campbell et al., 2001; Deitz et al., 2015; Relyea & Ullman, 2015; Ullman, 1996; 1999) with 78% of women reporting that their family turned against them when they disclosed rape (Fulero & Delara, 1976; Mason et al., 2004; Relyea & Ullman, 2015; Ullman, 2010). However, the research in this area is predominantly focussed on the experiences of white, Western women. In the limited research conducted with Black and Asian women, the family was cited by the women as the strongest source of support and strength they found when they disclosed rape to the support network (Bryant-Davis et al., 2011; Coker et al., 2002).

Clearly then women's experience differ in relation to cultural norms and values. There is significant evidence in the literature that those cultural differences influence how much women are blamed by their support network and how much women blame themselves for sexual violence (Kalra & Bhugra, 2013). Cultural norms influence the way in which women acknowledge or define their experiences as rape or sexual violence and when women blame themselves (Kalof, 2000; Sigurvinsdottir & Ullman, 2016). Patriarchal culture (Carmody & Washington, 2001) and racism have been found to play a role in how much Black, Hispanic and Asian women are blamed for rape (Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; Lefley, Scott, Llabre, & Hicks, 1993; Maier, 2008).

At the microsystem level, there are many factors affecting blame that relate to the woman's behaviour, character, appearance, social class, age, ethnicity, experiences, lifestyle, understanding and values that influence whether she is likely to be blamed for sexual violence or whether she will blame herself. Some authors have argued that when women have personal high acceptance of rape myths, they are more likely to blame themselves (Harned, 2005; Payne, 1999; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004; Woodhams & Sleath, 2012) and less likely to report to acknowledge they were raped

or report to police (Clay-Warner & Burt, 2005; Campbell et al., 2001; Du Mont et al., 2003).

Individual factors

Whether the woman has been abused or raped before (Ullman & Vasquez, 2015) and how she reacts to the sexual violence significantly changes the likelihood of them being blamed for the sexual violence and their own levels of self-blame throughout their lives (Filipas & Ullman, 2006; Greene & Navarro, 1998; Messman-Moore & Long, 2003; Miller et al., 2011). The research in this area is problematic, however, as it often links normal, common behaviours to revictimisation and tends to blame revictimisation on the behaviours or characters of the 'vulnerable' women (Filipas & Ullman, 2006; Ullman & Vasquez, 2015) rather than the actions of the perpetrator. This is despite there being no widely accepted theory to explain why the rates of sexual revictimisation are so high (Miller et al., 2011; 2007)

The personal characteristics and appearance of the woman has also been shown to influence whether she is blamed for sexual violence by observers. Research evidence shows that women are blamed using factors that are outside of her control, such as her sexual history with other partners, her ethnicity and her attractiveness to others (Coates & Wade, 2004; George & Martínez, 2002; Maurer & Robinson, 2008; Maier, 2008) and her body weight (Clarke & Lawson, 2009; Clarke & Stermac, 2011; Gotovac & Towson, 2015). Ethnicity needs much further research, but studies show that Black, Hispanic, Latina, Mexican and Asian women are likely to be blamed for sexual violence and blame themselves (Donovan, 2007; Foley et al., 1995; George & Martinez, 2002; Lefley et al., 1993; Maier, 2008). Even the age of the woman can

change the perception of the rape or the woman's credibility (Bows, 2016; Fileborn, 2017; Lea et al., 2011; Muram et al., 1992; Walby & Allen, 2004). This is especially important since the Crime Survey England and Wales did not count any statistics on the rape of women over 59 until 2015 despite the fact that older research had shown that of a large sample of older women, 79% of older women were raped by a stranger and that 72% of the rapes happened in their own homes (Muram et al., 1992) – which is a rare type of rape (Lea et al., 2011).

Along with characterological blame, there is behavioural blame and self-blame of women, relating to the way they acted before, during or after sexual violence (Miller et al., 2010). These behaviours have been shown to influence how much the woman is blamed and blames herself. Perilloux et al. (2014) found that the most common types of self-blame could be split into five categories which all included behaviours before and during the sexual assault or rape. The five categories were 'putting themselves in the situation', 'being drunk or high', 'not resisting enough', 'sending mixed messages to the perpetrator' and 'being too trusting of the perpetrator'. Despite the 'freeze response' being the most common survival mechanism in women who are raped or abused (Bucher & Manasse, 2011; Moller et al., 2017; Moor et al., 2013) – many women are blamed and self-blame for not fighting the perpetrator or not escaping the offence (Moor et al., 2013; Moller et al., 2017).

In addition, there is further evidence that the woman's own acknowledgement of the sexual violence has a profound impact on whether she accepts victim blaming and blames herself. When women are not sure whether they were raped or assaulted, self-blame increases (Peterson & Meulenhard, 2004). The literature surrounding acknowledgement is based on theories of women accepting rape myths, sexual scripts, gender roles and media representations of sexual violence (Miller et al.,

2011). Women subjected to sexual violence who do not acknowledge or recognise what was done to them are more likely to be revictimized (Classen et al., 2005; Heath et al., 2011; Littleton et al., 2009) and more likely to blame themselves for the event (Miller et al., 2011). This type of self-blame in unacknowledged rape and abuse can lead to counterfactual thinking in which women make significant changes to themselves and their lives, even if they had no rational relationship to sexual violence and would not protect them in reality (Alicke, 2000; Branscombe et al., 2003; Heath et al., 2011).

Summary of ecological model of victim blaming

Victim blaming is not an issue for the individual, but an issue for the entire world. Victim blaming may be perpetrated by an individual who says, thinks or does something to blame women for sexual violence – but just like the woman herself, the ecological model would suggest that they did not develop these attitudes and conclusions about women or sexual violence in a vacuum. The ecological model used in the literature review provides much-needed structure to the understanding of victim blaming of women subjected to sexual violence. However, it also serves to position the woman, the victim blaming and the self-blame as part of a large, multi-layered system within society.

Measuring victim blaming

Whilst studies discuss the level of victim blaming women experience and the victim blaming beliefs that are endorsed by the general public and professionals, most victim blaming research relies on broad sexual violence attitude scales such as the Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression (AMMSA; Gerger et al., 2007) and other tools that measure RMA such as the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale

(RMAS; Burt, 1980), the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMAS; Lonsway et al., 1999), the Attitudes Towards Rape Scale (ATR; Feild, 1978a), the Perceived Causes of Rape Scale (PCRS; Cowan & Quinton, 1997) and the R Scale (Costin, 1985). Whilst these tools provide important insight into the way individuals accept and use rape myths, none of these tools directly measure blame attribution towards women subjected to sexual violence but are often used to draw conclusions about victim blaming of women. Buddy & Miller (2001) caution against RMA being used as a singular explanation for victim blaming and RMA. Sleath (2011) cited Ward (1988) when arguing that many of the RMA scales do not measure victim blaming but measure wider social attitudes with some scales measuring too many dimensions in too few scale items.

There has been little research that has developed a standardised measure of victim blaming of women with authors developing their own measure to use within their own research (Sleath, 2011). Oftentimes, the approach that has been used is to present participants with vignettes and then to ask participants to attribute blame to the characters (Sleath, 2011; Viki & Abrams, 2002).

One of the most important issues in standardised measurement of blame is language. Most studies exploring victim blaming are actually measuring ‘responsibility’, ‘cause’, ‘fault’, ‘control over the situation’, ‘ability to avoid the situation’, ‘credibility’ and ‘sympathy for the victim’ (Sleath, 2011). Whilst Sleath (2011) accepted the conflation of language and listed eighteen synonyms of the word ‘blame’ to be used to assess victim blaming; linguistically, this is problematic. Whilst these concepts and words may be related to victim blaming, they are arguably not the same as attributing blame – and language use is important. Other authors agree that the conflation of cause, fault, responsibility and blame with other concepts

has been detrimental to the validity and interpretation of victim blaming and self-blame research findings (Critchlow et al., 1985; Heider, 1958; Shaver & Drown 1986).

In RMA scales, the sensitivity of language in measurement was explored by McMahon and Farmer (2009; 2011) who found that the IRMAS items were too obvious, too susceptible to socially desirable responding or were using language that was outdated (Frazier, Valtinson & Candell, 1994; Hinck & Thomas, 1999). Research with university students showed that there were items to which no one would say 'yes' and that had language that was no longer used in modern narratives about relationships or sexuality – but also that words such as 'slut' and 'slutty' were now more socially acceptable than decades earlier. In one study, university students changed the wording of an item from 'wearing a low cut top' to 'wearing slutty clothes' – which was perceived by the students as an improvement in the item language (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). The result of this study was the development of the updated IRMAS (known as the U-IRMAS) which is the most up to date, linguistically validated measure of RMA.

Therefore, any measurement of victim blaming of women needs to not only to be specific to the concept of blame, but also needs to be sensitive to historical, cultural and situational context to ensure the language used in the items or research questions is relevant and effective. Finally, measurement of victim blaming needs to encompass all forms of sexual violence rather than just rape, especially when considering the findings from the literature about the issues around language, acknowledgement of rape, labelling of sexual experiences and the way the word 'rape' is perceived by both by women subjected to sexual violence and observers in

the public or professional roles (Heath et al., 2011; McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2011).

Summary of Literature Review

The literature review conducted for this thesis presents a set of theories of victim blaming that were often being presented as singular explanations for victim blaming without acknowledging how they may interact. In addition to the accepted theories, the review highlighted many factors that are believed to be associated with victim blaming of women subjected to sexual violence. Authors argued that there were flaws in the use of language in the victim blaming research including the conflation of blame with cause, fault and responsibility; and the use of outdated measures of RMA and attitudes towards sexual violence. It was rare to find a standardised, validated tool to understand the direct attribution of blame towards women, but many studies continued to draw conclusions about the victim blaming of women using quantitative, correlational studies rather than talking to women about why they think women are blamed for sexual violence and whether they use those same reasons to blame themselves. There is a strong, evidenced link in the literature between victim blaming and self-blame, but the vehicle by which external victim blaming in society becomes self-blame is not clearly discussed. This thesis will present three studies which focus on exploring these problems in the literature.

Chapter 3: Thesis Methodology

This chapter discusses the choice to adopt a mixed method approach to the thesis and the rationale for this decision against the backdrop of methodological issues and factors presented by previous studies in this topic area. Beginning with a discussion of the methodological problems and concerns raised by previous authors, this section explores the research aims, ontological and epistemological positions and how these four factors influenced the thesis.

Problems with methodology in the victim blaming literature

The literature review revealed that the language construction and perception of sexual violence was central not only to study findings but also to study methodology and validity. An example of this was the way terms such as ‘cause’, ’fault’, ‘responsibility’ and ‘blame’ were used interchangeably throughout the literature to mean the same thing in a number of studies that discussed these words and meanings as if they were synonymous, which was detrimental to the methodology and interpretation of study findings (Shaver & Drown, 1986). The authors also supported the arguments of Critchlow et al. (1985) and Heider (1958) by reporting that when participants were asked to attribute blame, responsibility and causality to a variety of different individuals and situations, responsibility was attributed more than blame and causality. Shaver et al. (1985) argued that most self-blame research had not truly been measuring blame or self-blame and added that what Janoff-Bulman (1979) had previously categorised as characterological blame and behavioural blame were in fact attributions of causality and responsibility, respectively. Finally, Shaver & Drown (1986) argued that even when ‘caused’ and ‘was responsible for’

are held as equivalents, neither adequately describe blaming or self-blame. This consideration is important in terms of the way that language can be received and interpreted by participants of studies and readers of research because the of way that language can be constructed to mean so many different things. The way participants may respond to questions about how much a woman who has been raped or sexually assaulted 'caused' their assault may be different to questions about them 'taking responsibility' or whether the participant attributes 'blame' to their behaviours or personalities. This indicates the importance of the way language is used in the questions or stimuli used with research participants.

Findings in the literature about the nature of victim blaming and RMA were related to the power dynamics and hierarchy of society. Discussions about victim blaming and RMA often discussed women's place in society, gender role stereotypes and the relationship between men and women's roles in families, communities and social life. Therefore, it appears that the analysis of discourses would be vital – and that language is likely to change and influence findings of studies. A good example of the way sound method exposed the issue with language is the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES; Koss et al., 2007) in which the authors of the study asked two questions of the same nature but using different terminology about rape, to check for difference in perception. Whilst a large group of participants answered that they had been forced to have sex they did not consent to, only a small amount of the same group of participants agreed that they had been raped, when the question specifically employed that terminology (Donde et al., 2018). Therefore, it was clear that the careful analysis of discourse and language would be crucial in developing the methodology of the thesis. This led to an interest in linguistics in the development of the psychometric measure chapter. Furthermore, the issues surrounding language

also influenced the decision to use critical discourse analysis to analyse the responses from women and professionals talking about victim blaming and self-blame.

Previous literature has shown that victim blaming of women is linked to misogyny, sexism, gender roles and the expectations placed on women to not only control their own sexuality but to control the sexuality of men (Burt, 1980; Brownmiller, 1975; Payne et al. 1999). Feminist analysis could be vital to a rounded understanding of victim blaming in sexual violence towards women and girls in society. Rape scripts and rape stereotypes such as the ‘real rape’ stereotype, the concept of ‘token resistance’ and the ‘infallible victim’ stereotype are socially constructed narratives embedded in societal sexism (Garcia, 1998; Kunst et al., 2018; McMahon & Farmer, 2011; Payne et al., 1999; Sleath, 2011). For these reasons, a feminist epistemology was considered important for this body of work – so that not only could individual bias, cognitive processes and social theories be used to consider the process of victim blaming but for these factors to be considered through a feminist lens which presupposes a society in which women are oppressed, discriminated against and sexualised. These two findings from the literature review influenced both the epistemology and ontology of the primary research.

Ontology and epistemology

This thesis approaches reality and knowledge from a critical realist perspective (Bhaskar, 1975;1989); utilising a realist approach to ontology and a relativist approach to epistemology. Critical realism is often seen as a middle way between positivism on the one hand and interpretivism on the other, thus, reinventing a new and more sophisticated version of realist ontology (Zachariadis et al., 2010). Critical

realism accommodates both constructivist and realist positions to knowledge, and argues that whilst meaning is made in interaction and language, there are events, mechanisms and elements that are not made in discourse or exist outside of discourse, which also impact on the meaning of social discourses and on the person with real effects. There are therefore elements of the world that are socially constructed and there are other elements, mechanisms and institutions that exist regardless of interpretations of them (Parr, 2015).

Whilst there has been tension between feminist standpoint theory and critical realism (Parr, 2015), they have some important synergies including the assertions that the knower and the known are interactive, but there are some factual and real elements of the world that exist and act without the knower influencing or understanding them. Both have similar axiology; as they both argue from a constructivist perspective that inquiry and research is always value laden, historically, culturally and socially situated. Both approaches therefore, place importance on critical approaches and reflexivity.

Working from a wholly relativist approach would position the harm from sexual violence and victim blaming as relative and entirely socially constructed. Whilst the understanding of these issues and the societal discourses surrounding them are constructed by language, the harm and impact of sexual violence and victim blaming remain real, tangible facts affecting millions of people around the world. In addition to the immutable harm caused by sexual violence and victim blaming, the act of sexual violence and the experience of victim blaming should be explored through the feminist lens which champions the voice and experiences of women as a marginalised and oppressed group of people living in a power-laden society of hierarchies:

> *Early feminism inspired by the direct sharing of accounts of women's experiences began to theorize about the structures of women's oppression within society, and the nature of the mechanisms which operated so powerfully to produce inequality at all levels*
>
> (Clegg, 2006, p.316)

This thesis employs a mixed methods approach and presents two qualitative studies utilising a critical discourse analysis of semi-structured interviews and one quantitative study seeking to explore and develop a tool to measure blame attributed to women subjected to diverse forms of sexual violence. A critical realist approach utilising feminist standpoint theory influenced the method employed in all studies.

The qualitative studies take the view of women as experts of their own experiences and sought to provide space for women subjected to sexual violence (and the professionals they sought help from) to talk about why they thought women were blamed and why women blamed themselves, drawing on their own experiences, positions in the world, their experiences of seeking and giving advice and the attitudes and values of the world around them. The data is analysed using critical discourse analysis to explore how both groups of participants were using language to construct their understanding of victim blaming and self-blame of women. To honour the voices and expertise of women who had been subjected to sexual violence and victim blaming, the data was shared with the participants so that they were able to engage in critical feedback of the researcher's findings and interpretation before submission.

In the process of analysis, the researcher is not taken to be an objective, separate knower (as may be advocated by a positivist approach) but is interacting with the

topic, data, knowledge and the people who participated in the studies, whilst also drawing on their own experiences and knowledge (Yardley, 2000). This informed the need for critical reflexivity.

Critical realist approaches to inquiry, whilst utilising a relativist epistemology, do not rule out quantitative methods in research. However, they do propose a critical perspective on statistical methods, the search for causation in data and the way quantitative effects are often only specific to the 'closed environment' they were tested or observed within, whilst the same methods or causes often provide diverse range of outcomes in an 'open environment', such as the social world (Zachariadis et al., 2010).

For the psychometric measure chapter, this means following the process of exploration, development and factor analysis of a large body of quantitative data but approaching interpretation and conclusions with a critical realist approach as proposed by Baskhar (1978) teamed with the common-sense analysis of factor analysis data proposed by Kline (1993).

The act of blaming a woman for being subjected to sexual violence through the employment of discourses and ideologies is unlikely to have a clear, linear or causal relationship with a singular factor, even in a controlled environment utilising quantitative data analysis. Despite this, many studies have focussed on measuring attitudes and relationships using self-report, quantitative measures (see Anderson, (1999) for a discussion). Such are these complex issues that they are often experienced and impact different people in different ways in an open environment, representative of complex interactions between factors. This offers an opportunity for mixed methods research, which can offer additional, diverse modalities to explore

victim blaming and self-blame experiences in more depth, and in a more naturalistic approach (Anderson, 1999).

Despite criticism of mixed methods research, especially by those who favour one approach or those who are primarily concerned with generalisability and sample validity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), mixed methods research provides context to data, draws on the strengths from each method and can even provide stronger evidence due to being able to explore and corroborate findings from each method (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This thesis therefore uses an iterative sequential mixed methods research design with learning from each study influencing the design and inference of findings of the next. This approach ends with a meta-inference from all studies in this thesis, which will be presented in the discussion section.

Critical reflexivity

Authenticity and transparency are important to this project, and indeed to qualitative research endeavours in general (Yardley, 2000). As a researcher, I do not consider myself to be an independent knower or observer. I consider myself to be actively engaged in critical reflection in the process of research. As a woman living in the same society as the participants, affected by the same misogyny, and as a woman who has also been subjected to sexual violence and victim blaming in my own life, I bring my own knowledge, experience and understanding to the research. As well as working in research, I am also a feminist activist campaigning in the prevention of violence against women, meaning I not only have my own approaches to the subject but that I chose to undertake the PhD research to better understand the experiences of women who had been blamed or who blame themselves for sexual violence. I have years of experience working with many women and girls who have been

subjected to sexual violence and have managed hundreds of criminal justice trials for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses. This means that I do not consider myself to be objective, just as I do not consider any researcher to be objective. For this reason, critical reflexivity, clinical supervision and additional people checking the interpretation of data and analysis is vital. It is my view that critical reflexivity is not the same as the 'bracketing' approach utilised in interpretative phenomenological research in which the researcher is to aspire to 'bracket off' their own experiences, biases and agenda in order to conduct more neutral data collection and data analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Critical reflexivity engaged from a feminist standpoint instead argues that I am not only unable to be completely neutral but that I am also in an immutable power dynamic with participants of the research and with other academics and colleagues throughout the research process. It was this reflection that led me to offer all participants the opportunity to read and give feedback on the data interpretation and findings, to ensure their views and experiences had not been misinterpreted.

Research with oppressed and marginalised groups can run the risk of being exploitative or voyeuristic, especially in studies in which the real life experiences of people are collected by a researcher who is not from the community, who then analyses and interprets the data from their own perspective and then never reconnects with those people who shared their trauma or experiences with them. Feminist standpoint theory argues that the best work can be done when we champion the voices of women, but we must also include them in our analysis, interpretation and write up – especially if that means they can have an opinion on or help to guide our inference of their speech or stories. This in turn led to deeper

reflection and inter-reflexivity, in which I then reflected on how participants had interpreted their own responses and my interpretation of them.

Chapter 4

Study 1: Development and initial testing of the BOWSVA psychometric measure: Blame of Women Subjected to Sexual Violence and Abuse

Abstract

This study analyses the limitations of existing scales that have been used to measure victim blaming and presents the initial scale development of a new measure of the Blame of Women Subjected to Sexual Violence and Abuse (BOWSVA Scale), which was designed to directly measure victim blaming. A total of 456 participants were recruited from the general public to answer 55 items, which were short descriptions of diverse examples of sexual offences under the Sexual Offences Act (2003) and were asked to assign blame to the female victim and the male perpetrator in each. All participants then completed the Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (U-IRMAS) and were invited to give feedback on their participation. A principle component analysis was undertaken, and the results indicated a 44-item, seven factor solution to the victim blaming of women: (1) She was asking for it, (2) She was in a dangerous situation, (3) She should have been more assertive, (4) He was entitled to her body, (5) The non-stereotypical sex offender, (6) The stereotypical rape myth and (7) She was a sexually active woman. The overall scale and seven subscales had good internal consistency. Scores from participants suggested that victim blaming of the woman may have depended on the language used to describe her or the sexual offence. Concurrent validity testing showed strong positive relationships between some BOWSVA and U-IRMAS subscales. Further research is needed to continue to validate and explore the factor structure and capabilities of this new measure.

Introduction

Victim blaming in relation to sexual violence is described as the action of placing the blame of a sexual offence on the victim instead of the sex offender. Examples of victim blaming include suggesting that the way in which the victim acted, appeared, behaved, looked or responded caused or encouraged or did not successfully stop a sex offender from assaulting them. Over time, the reasoning behind victim blaming has been explored, with many researchers linking victim blaming with RMA and sexism (Sleath, 2011). Stemming from the feminist movement, Burt (1980) defined rape myths as being a set of inaccurate and harmful beliefs and myths about rape which contribute to hostility towards women. From this point, many of the studies of victim blaming relied on RMA measurement and attitudinal scales of hostility to women or sexist beliefs. In 1999, Payne, Lonsway & Fitzgerald argued that rape myths tended to fit into seven categories, which have influenced many studies and psychometric measures of rape myths since. The five categories of rape myth were that ‘women asked for it’, ‘women wanted it’, ‘women lie about it’, ‘it wasn’t really rape’, ‘men didn’t mean to rape’, ‘rape is a trivial event’ and ‘rape is a deviant event’. Sexism has also featured in many studies and theories of victim blaming including the critique of patriarchal systems oppressing women such as gender, the impact of the pornified society and sexual stereotypes that women are expected to conform to. In addition, victim blaming in sexual violence has a history of being explained with BJW (Lerner, 1980; Sleath, 2011). The underpinning theory of BJW (that people deserve what they get and get what they deserve), sounds like a reasonable fit with the concept of women being blamed for sexual violence, especially when women are reframed as bad, promiscuous or irresponsible to ‘explain’ why they were sexually

assaulted or raped. However, studies have shown differences in the relationship between RMA, BJW and victim blaming – with some studies supporting the correlations and some studies finding no evidence at all of correlations (Correia et al., 2001; Sleath, 2011).

Research treats victim blaming as a set of attitudes similar to RMA, BJW and sexism. Therefore, most studies exploring these attitudes use psychometric measures with large numbers of people to gather data for exploratory and correlational studies (Anderson, 1999). The most common measures used to assess victim blaming have been the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMAS) (Burt, 1980) the AMMSA, (Gerger et al., 2013) and the IRMAS (Payne et al. 1999). Whilst these measures have been shown to be valid and reliable in measuring RMA and sexual aggression myth acceptance – there are issues to consider when discussing how they are currently used in the topic of victim blaming. Briefly, the three core issues include the way the items are written and affected by socially desirable responses, the language used to describe the action of 'blame' and the way the scales have been used to draw conclusions about victim blaming without measuring blame attribution at all.

Whilst it is logical to suggest that people who accept common rape myths are likely to blame victims of sexual violence, the current scales do not seek to measure whether or how people blame the victims of sexual violence, they seek to measure the acceptance of myths and stereotypes about women, rape, sex and gender roles – which whilst arguably related, are separate concepts (Dawtry et al., 2019, p.2). Rape myths are common societal myths about rape, sex offenders and their victims whilst victim blaming is about how much blame is assigned to an individual victim of sexual violence. To draw conclusions about the prevalence and type of victim

blaming in a sample, the psychometric measure would require valid items pertaining to the blame of sexual violence victims, which presents important questions about previous studies which have used RMA and attitudinal scales to theorise or hypothesise about victim blaming in sexual violence. Have previous studies conflated RMA with victim blaming?

Some of the RMA measures contain items or subscales that blame the woman for sexual violence. In the IRMAS, subscales 'she asked for it' and 'she lied' both focus on the character of the woman. However, whilst a woman 'asking for it' would be perceived as victim blaming, asking participants about items that positioned women as lying about sexual violence is more about rape denial than victim blaming. Accusing a woman of lying about rape happening is not the same as blaming her for being raped. Burt's RMAS (1980) includes several rape myth items that relate to the behavioural and characterological blame of the woman. In a similar way, asking participants whether they believe rape myths about the blame of women is not the same as asking participants whether they blame women for being subjected to sexual violence. Items about agreeing to rape myths or sexist beliefs may be related to the attribution of blame to a woman but these are concepts which could be measured separately (Dawtry et al., 2019).

The second issue is the way the items in previous and existing scales are written, which includes problems with scales having outdated language. In Burt's RMAS there was outdated and colloquial language in the items such as 'necking', that was no longer used by the time Lonsway & Fitzgerald (1995) started to study RMA. Issues with item structure and type were suggested, as Burt's RMAS utilised agreement items and other open ended or multiple-choice questions of prevalence and attitudes within the same scale (Xue et al., 2016). Critiques about language and

item meaning contributed to the development and testing of the IRMAS (Payne et al., 1999), which included considerations of item linguistics, colloquial words and phrases and item clarity during validation (Xue et al., 2016).

The original IRMAS was a 40-item, seven factor measure that was used widely after validation. The seven factors included (1) she asked for it, (2) it wasn't really rape, (3) he didn't mean to, (4) she wanted it, (5) she lied, (6) rape is a trivial event and (7) rape is a deviant event. The scales therefore sought to measure specific beliefs about the woman and her culpability, beliefs about the perpetrator of the rape and wider societal beliefs about rape as an event.

Later, McMahon & Farmer (2011) also recognised that issues with language were important to psychometric measurement of RMA. By engaging an undergraduate sample to seek their perceptions of the items, the authors redeveloped the IRMAS and named it the Updated IRMAS. McMahon & Farmer (2011) found that the most overt sub-scales including 'she wanted it' and 'rape is a trivial event' were so unlikely to be answered honestly, that they removed them from the U-IRMAS. This followed comments from the undergraduate participants that no one would ever agree with the items even if they really did agree with them (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). There were also changes in language between the publication date of the IRMAS (1999) and the year of study (2011) which led the researchers to replace the words 'woman' and 'man' with the terms 'girls' and 'boys' more often used to describe young adults; and the addition of the words 'slut' and 'slutty' to the items to reflect feedback from the undergraduate students that this was now the most common way of describing women's sexual behaviours.

This study provided evidence for concerns that the items written in scales must be updated as the population changes and must consider the way socially desirable responses may also change over time and between different populations. For example, whilst the group of undergraduates eliminated three sub-scales because they felt they were too overt – they chose to add the words ‘slut’ and ‘slutty’ in place of ‘a woman who wears a low cut top’ which could be seen as contradictory changes to eliminate the overt statements in one sub-scale but to then add in more overt language elsewhere. This may also suggest that words like ‘slut’ and ‘slutty’ have become normalised sexual slurs over the decade. The findings from this study also suggest that undergraduates are now more aware of giving socially acceptable responses to self-report measures and attitude questionnaires, even when anonymous.

The third issue to be considered is about the language used to discuss the act of blaming victims of sexual violence and the impact this has on measurement and research methodology. The literature review discussed in chapter 2 showed that researchers have been using ‘fault’, ‘blame’, ‘cause’ and ‘responsibility’ interchangeably. For example, studies showed that participants were asked who was to blame but the conclusions were about who was responsible – despite other authors finding that people perceive and employ blame, cause and responsibility differently (Shaver & Drown, 1986) – often with ‘blame’ being the most emotive and ‘taking responsibility’ being the most socially acceptable terms used about victims of sexual violence (Shaver & Drown, 1986; Shaver, 1985; Critchlow et al., 1985; Heider, 1958).

To illustrate this point, consider the following passage in a national media outlet which argues that blaming women for sexual or domestic violence is not the same as holding them responsible for their behaviour during or before they were attacked:

> *'With respect to prevention, understanding the conditions that lead to crime can facilitate safety. College women should not get drunk (or drink anything that was left unattended), not because it makes them morally contributory but because it's a sensible approach to personal safety. If a woman thinks there's a good chance of her getting hit during an argument, she should seriously consider leaving the relationship—but she should also avoid arguments until the issue has been clarified. Getting into an argument doesn't mean she would be blameworthy for getting hit; it just means she would be putting herself at risk. (…) when it comes to treatment of victims, they are often encouraged to take no responsibility at all for what happened.* (Karson, 2014)

This frequent conflation and contradiction of the terms in discourse means that even when research participants have been asked about blame, some researchers have written discussions about responsibility or causal reasoning (Shaver et al., 1979). For this reason, the third consideration of psychometric measures of victim blaming must be linguistics. If participants are asked questions about victim blame, the term 'blame' must be used consistently. As an extension to the argument of linguistics, the same can be said for the way the word 'rape' is perceived by participants in contrast to the term 'sexual assault' or 'non-consensual sex' – or even 'forced to have sex'. Studies have shown that even when participants have been raped, less than half of them say yes when asked directly in questionnaires (Donde et al., 2018). Studies find that women who have been raped or sexually assaulted respond differently to the language used in the item (Donde et al., 2018). Considering the issues of

linguistics in sexual violence and blame, psychometricians must remain vigilant to the way technically correct words may affect the way respondents answer items. It may therefore be of use to look at blame and myth acceptance for a range of sexual offences, using diverse language to describe the offences to explore how the words may affect responses from groups of participants.

The original aim of this study was to utilise existing, validated psychometric measures to explore how much blame would be assigned to women subjected to sexual violence. However, due to the problems with existing measures as discussed above, and lack of specificity (to victim blaming of women rather than broader attitudes to women, sexual aggression or rape myths), it was decided that a new psychometric tool should be built and tested to specifically measure the assignment of *blame* of women subjected to all different forms of sexual violence in the modern world. The issues with existing scales discussed above were considered at all stages of design, development and testing. This chapter provides a description of the process used to design, develop and test the new measure of victim blaming of women subjected to sexual violence.

Method

Mapping existing measures

In order to explore the requirement for a new psychometric measure, examination and mapping of all existing items was conducted on the updated IRMAS, the AMMSA, the RMAS and the PVBS (Rayburn et al., 2003).

The items from each measure were first explored to look for overlapping items, language use and the meaning of items (full lists of items in this analysis are contained within Appendix 3a). The U-IRMAS and AMMSA had an overlap of 8 items

which map directly on to each other, three of which also map directly on to items from the RMAS. The wording of these items were similar and were likely to be measuring the same concepts.

The language of blame was also of interest whilst exploring the existing measures. U-IRMAS uses the words ‘responsible’ and ‘fault’ in one item each but the word ‘blame’ is not used in any of the items. In the U-IRMAS, items 1-5 from subscale ‘she asked for it’ are statements of victim blaming which could be used to test for one type of victim blaming attitude, that women ask to be raped. However, the other items pertain to a range of rape myths and not victim blaming. Similarly, Burt’s RMAS items are based on hostile sexism, violence against women and rape myths rather than direct victim blame attribution. The AMMSA measures attitudes and rape myths. It uses the phrases ‘partly to blame’ in one item, but the rest of the items do not contain any of the words, ‘blame’, ‘responsibility’, ‘fault’ or ‘cause’.

The PVBS is different from the other measures due to being vignette-based and the items asking participants about the character of the victim (Rayburn et al., 2003). Three items on the PVBS are related to blame. One item asks about whether the victim is blameless or blameworthy, a second item asks whether the victim is at fault or faultless and a third item asks whether the victim is responsible or irresponsible. All others ask the participant about other perceptions of the victim including whether they think they are kind, hurtful, harmless, good-natured and reliable.

Content analysis of all items of the U-IRMAS, AMMSA, RMAS, PVBS and Burt’s Sex roles and Interpersonal Violence Scale was conducted, to explore the main constructs being measured in each scale. Analysis of the language and meaning of

the items revealed the following themes of victim blaming of women in sexual violence:

1. Women engage in behaviours that cause or encourage rape – behavioural blame
2. Men cannot or should not control their sexual desires and women must accept their lack of restraint towards them
3. Stereotypical gender role and sex role assumptions that imply a 'norm' of misogyny
4. There is something about the woman (character, attitudes, mental state, motivations) that causes rape or enables women to use sex/rape as a weapon - characterological blame
5. Women and society overreact to sexual advances
6. Rape is not as prevalent or important an issue as it is being perceived (rape denial)
7. Other items that are not related to blame, rape myths or other attitudes

Table 1: Exploration of item themes in each measure used in victim blaming literature

Scale Title (# of items)	Behavioural blame of woman (1)	Male sexual entitlement (2)	Stereotypical misogynistic norms (3)	Characterological blame of woman (4)	Women and society overreact (5)	Rape denial (6)	Other (7)
U-IRMAS (22)	9 – 41%	4 – 18%	0	5 – 23%	0	4 – 18%	0
AMMSA (30)	3 – 10%	5 – 16%	5 – 16%	2 – 7%	7 – 23%	8 – 26%	0
BURT SEX ROLES (34)	3 – 9%	2 – 6%	14 – 41%	5 – 15%	0	3 – 9%	0
BURT RMAS (20)	6 – 30%	0	0	4 – 20%	0	0	10 – 50%
PVBS (14)	0	0	0	3 – 21%	0	0	11-79%

Across all scales, U-IRMAS had the highest proportions of ‘behavioural victim blame’ rape myths and ‘male sexual entitlement’ items, AMMSA had the highest proportions of ‘women and society overreact’ and ‘rape denial’ items, Burt Sex Roles and Interpersonal Violence Scale had the highest proportion of ‘stereotypical sex and gender roles that imply a norm of misogyny’ and PVBS scale had the highest proportion of ‘characterological blame of women’ items. Burt’s RMAS contained specific items that related to victim blaming of women, but the item structure differed significantly across items. 50% of items related to characterological or behavioural blame of women, but the other half of the items were questions about prevalence, beliefs and percentages of reported rapes.

Within scales, U-IRMAS was made up of items describing behavioural blame, male sexual entitlement, characterological blame and rape denial items. As the only scale based solely on appraisal of the victim in specific scenarios, the PVBS scale had three items of characterological blame and eleven items that were not related to blame. Burt’s scale is focussed on gender roles, sexism, conservatism and characterological blame of women as devious or manipulative.

The most comprehensive scale (i.e., encompassing the most themes within the items) was the AMMSA but rather than measuring victim blaming of women, the items held the largest focus on the minimisation and trivialisation of rape with the two item themes ‘women and society overreact to sexual advances’ and ‘rape denial’ items making up around half of the items.

A second content analysis was conducted on the items from all four scales to explore how many of the items are statements of victim blaming and how many of the items are statements of perpetrator defending or excusing. The analysis was top-

down, exploring how many items are explicitly about victim blaming, how many are explicitly about the perpetrator defending and how many are more general statements about sex, roles, gender or society at large. This was conducted by counting frequency of words, phrases and meaning, which was checked by second and third coders (Appendix 3b).

Table 2: General themes of the items that measure blame of women in psychometric measures used in victim blaming literature

Items	AMMSA	U-IRMAS	PVBS	BURT SEX ROLES & IPV	BURT RMAS
Measure blame of the woman directly	4	11	3	6	10
Measure the defence of the perpetrator directly	13	7	0	7	0
Measure agreement to statements about larger societal narratives or other issues	13	4	0	21	10

The analysis found that scales that are used to draw conclusions about victim blaming of women do not measure the blame of women specifically. In some cases, such as the AMMSA, the scale focusses much more on perpetrator excusing and social narratives of sexism and attitudes towards sex. Burt's sex roles and interpersonal violence scale was mainly made up of items which measured the wider social narratives of sexism and misogyny with only a 1/5th of items directly measuring the blame of women. Half of the items on the U-IRMAS and on Burt's original RMAS (1980) directly measured the blame of the woman or girl. The PVBS focusses solely on the victim and asks participants to read a scenario and then to decide on characteristics of the person based on what they read. Whilst only one of the items is about blame, two more include 'fault' and 'responsibility', seemingly presented as individual and unrelated concepts. The rest of the items are characterological but are

not related to blame. An example of the feature analysis and notes is contained within Appendix 3b.

However, whilst this scale did focus on the victim, it requires scenarios, which does not lend itself well to standardised test or attitude measurement as scenarios can be interpreted differently by different participants. Scenarios often contain numerous salient factors that may influence the answers, and it may be difficult to know which factor in the scenario contributed to the responses of the participants.

When developing the current measure, the scenario method was initially considered. However, the use of scenarios was deemed inappropriate given the primary aim of the research, which was to obtain highly specific, quantitative measures of the apportioning of blame towards women subjected to sexual violence. The scenario method would have entailed presenting each participant with detailed passages of sexual violence examples (such as those used in Abrams et al. (2003) and Dawtry et al. (2019)) which may have made it more difficult to draw conclusions about why participants apportioned blame in the way they did due to the number of salient factors within a detailed scenario. However, shorter items used in psychometric measures could encounter the same difficulties that arise from the linguistics used in the items; but answers arising from short, controlled items were considered easier to analyse and interpret than detailed scenarios.

Item development

As discussed by Clark & Watson (1995), language and item construction can make or break a psychometric measure with poor wording, biased language, emotive language and item complexity influencing the way respondents interpret and answer items. Despite this, item development processes and face validity are not

consistently reported in the literature, with one review study finding that only 66% of 114 scale development articles had conducted or reported face validity processes to evidence the items used in the new scales (Anthoine et al., 2014). Furthermore, the same study found that most scale development articles did not give descriptive information about individual items or score distributions. These criticisms are important to the transparency of item development and so this section provides thorough details of how the items of the BOWSVA were developed and tested.

At an early stage, items were developed to represent as many different scenarios of male-perpetrated sexual violence against women as possible which resulted in over 60 items describing sexual violence ranging from sexual harassment in the street from a stranger through to rape in a long-term relationship due to emotional blackmail. Items were initially developed to cover the offences in the Sexual Offences Act (2003). This decision was made in order to reduce ambiguity about whether the item described a real sexual offence and further, to increase validity of the measure by ensuring that all items correctly described an illegal sexual act. The descriptions of sexual offences according to the law were then manipulated to include different male and female characters and language to describe these items in different ways – in order to make them as diverse as possible for the research.

It was intended that one set of items would be specific scenarios such as ‘A woman makes a sex tape with her husband. Years later when they divorce, he posts it all over the internet’ in which participants would answer whether they thought the woman was to blame using a Likert-type scale. In addition to this, the original plan was to include a second set of items containing general statements of victim blaming in society such as ‘Women sometimes bring rape upon themselves by the way they

act' in which participants would respond with their agreement or disagreement with the statement on a Likert-type scale.

During the process it was decided that the general statements items bore too much resemblance to the U-IRMAS and AMMSA so all items were deleted and focus remained on the specific items exploring how much participants would blame the woman in each scenario of sexual violence. Instead, it was decided that when the items were ready for testing with a large sample, they would be tested with the U-IRMAS to look for concurrent validity with the more general statements of RMA.

The items then went through three stages of critique, amendment and feedback with an expert group of 12 academics and professionals specialising in sexual violence; who agreed to examine and give feedback on items, scale structure and measurement. Due to the complexity of the items and the development of the scale, this process occurred seven times in total, until the final items were agreed upon for testing with a general public sample.

The process of critique, amendment and feedback

With the initial 55 items developed, linguistic analysis of item content was undertaken to ensure that the items were not weighted heavily one way, such as having too many items that include descriptions of vulnerable women. This task was highly valuable to the process to ensure that the scale and items are as valid as possible.

The item contents were analysed using a tally system (examples of this process are in Appendix 3c). Content was explored for overt/subtle, stereotypical/non-

stereotypical, stranger perpetrator/familiar perpetrator, vulnerable/non-vulnerable woman, woman choice/constrained choice and behavioural/characterological descriptors.

Initial results revealed that the items were generally well balanced (see Table 3) but analysis showed that the content in some items heavily outweighed others and needed to be corrected.

Table 3: Balancing the content of items developed for BOWSVA

Item Content	Explanation	Ratio before correction
Overt versus subtle	Is the scenario used overt? (Use of word rape, attack, assault, force, threaten and the use of scenarios that would be easily perceived to be an offence by general participants) Is the scenario used more subtle? (Use of word persuaded, touched and the use of scenarios that might not be easily perceived as an offence by general participants)	25:26
Stereotypical versus non-stereotypical	Does the scenario conform to common rape myths in the literature? Is the scenario outside of common rape myths and societal myths about sexual violence, perpetrators or victims?	22:29
Stranger perpetrator versus familiar perpetrator	Does the scenario describe a sexual offence in which the perpetrator is a stranger (passer-by, person in a bar, person they have just met, person on train) or someone familiar to the woman (work colleague, boyfriend, husband, brother in law, friend, boss)?	27:28
Vulnerable woman versus non-vulnerable woman	Does the scenario present the woman as vulnerable in some way (homeless, drunk, scared, threatened, in poverty, drug-dependent) or does the scenario present the woman as non-vulnerable (a CEO of a company, strong, confident, feeling safe, having fun, with her friends)?	25:27
Woman had perceived choices versus woman forced or constrained	Does the scenario present a situation where the woman might be perceived as having a choice (being offered a place to stay in return for sex with strangers, being told to have sex to pay her debts off, being too scared to say no to a partner) or does the scenario present a situation where the woman was clearly forced (weapon, threatened, attacked, beaten, trapped, unconscious, asleep)?	36:18
Victim behavioural detail versus victim character detail	Does the scenario comment on the victim's behaviour in some way (she walked home alone, she went out to a bar, she got a new job) or does the scenario comment on the victim's character in some way (she is flirty, sexy, happy, embarrassed, scared, ashamed)?	13:42

Where items were deemed to be not adequately balanced, the researcher worked to edit items to ensure balance. This was then re-checked and commented on by

members of the expert group until the items were accepted as optimum, and not biased in one direction or the other.

Language use

The second feature explored whilst constructing the items was the language used throughout the items to talk about sexual violence. Considering arguments from McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance (2011) and Heath et al. (2011) it was important to ensure that items did not just use the word ‘rape’ or ‘assault’ and instead used different words and phrases to describe the sexual violence in the items. It was concluded that the items would contain the different terms used in sexual violence to ensure that items were not confounded by a misunderstanding of what a ‘rape’ or ‘sexual assault’ is.

Table 4: Balancing the language used to describe sexual offences in the BOWSVA items

Language used in item	Number of items
Rape	17
Sexually Assaulted/Abused	10
Forced to	5
Touched	4
Emotional terms such as manipulated, threatened, scared	4
Does not specify exactly what happened	11

As seen in Table 4, the findings showed that rape was used significantly more than any other term. The ideal number of items per language type was around 8 items each – and so as the items were being reworded, they were also checked again for the language used to describe the sexual violence to ensure more balanced items.

This task also revealed that 11 of the items did not specify a sexual offence clearly enough. Items were changed and then re-checked by the expert group to ensure that every item clearly described a sexual offence under the SOA (2003).

Once the items were balanced and linguistic issues had been addressed, a private questionnaire was sent to 12 experts in sexual violence for them to respond to a face validity survey on each item (Appendix 4). The purpose of the face validity stage, was to check whether professionals working in sexual violence felt that the items were easy to read, were realistic scenarios of sexual violence and whether they felt the item may elicit victim blaming from a general public sample.

Face Validity

Expert Group Demographics

- 12 experts specialising in sexual violence
- 7 females and 5 males
- Aged between 26-55 years old
- Education levels varied from high school certificates to PhD.
- 2 worked in social care, 4 worked in psychology, 2 worked in education, 1 worked in prison service, 1 worked in law and 2 worked in a sexual violence charity

For face validity of the items, the expert group were invited to take part in a questionnaire assessing three qualities of each item: whether the item was worded clearly, whether the item represented a realistic example of sexual violence and whether they thought some people would blame the woman in the scenario. Each professional was able to provide feedback on any of these qualities in addition to providing any other feedback or comments they thought would affect the validity of the item.

Table 5: Face validity responses for all 55 items

Professional response	Is the item realistic?	Is the item wording clear?	Might this item result in victim blaming?
Yes	90%	91%	99%
No	10%	9%	1%

Some items caused more comments than others, with some of the expert group being concerned that item language like ‘a woman with no class’ or ‘known for being a slag’ or ‘she doesn’t act like a decent woman’ is so unrealistic that no one would answer the item. This was an interesting observation as it was similar to the results from McMahon & Farmer (2011). Some also commented that they hoped that items which presented clear scenarios of rape and violent assault would cause no one to blame the victim at all, but they accepted that some participants probably would. Where language, clarity or level of reality was critiqued by the expert group, the items were amended or reworded and checked again with the group.

Response item and measurement development

The final stage of construction involved the design and re-design of the measurement scale. It was decided in the early stages that the word used in the measurement would be ‘blame’ rather than fault, responsibility or cause, in line with arguments about conflation of language (Critchlow et al., 1985; Heider, 1958; Shaver & Drown, 1986).

As a specific measure of ‘victim blaming’, the measure needed to ask participants how much they *blamed* the woman for being subjected to the sexual offence by a man. Initially, the items were to be accompanied by a single 4-option forced Likert-type scale which asked how much the woman was to blame for the sexual offence occurring. It was decided to deliberately remove a ‘middle’ or ‘I don’t know’ option in such a controversial topic in case participants chose to ‘sit on the fence’ for difficult

items. It was also consciously decided not to use the word ‘victim’ in the measurement question and instead to refer to the victim of the sexual offences as ‘the woman’ to avoid leading respondents who might not feel she was a victim of an offence at all.

Version 1:

How much is the woman to blame for what happened?

Definitely not to blame Probably not to blame Probably to blame Definitely to blame

Despite the participants of this study being anonymous computer users (which is linked to more honest responses in self-report measures (Gribble et al., 1999)), socially desirable responses are still common in self-report measures assessing sensitive topics (Mann & Hollin, 2010). It was considered that presenting a scenario describing a sexual offence and then only asking participants how much the woman is to blame would result in significant socially desirable responding. It was also discussed within the professional group that it is common to hear people excuse perpetrators or apportion blame to both the victim and the perpetrator of a sexual offence. Due to this, it was suggested that offering two options to apportion blame may reduce socially desirable responses such as self-deceptive positivity and impression management (Mann & Hollin, 2010), especially for those participants who feel both parties are to blame in sexual offences. As some participants may blame both the woman and the man in certain scenarios, two sets of response items were chosen (below) to explore whether there is any relationship between the amount of blame apportioned to the man and the woman in each scenario. The decision was again made to use the neutral term ‘the man’ rather than ‘the offender’ or ‘the perpetrator’ of the sexual offences being described in the scenarios. The final

version of measurement is below, in which each participant reads the scenario and then indicates how much they feel each person is to blame for what happened.

Version 2:

How much is the woman to blame for what happened?

Definitely not to blame	*Probably not to blame*	*Probably to blame*	*Definitely to blame*
Score 0	*Score 1*	*Score 2*	*Score 3*

How much is the man to blame for what happened?

Definitely not to blame	*Probably not to blame*	*Probably to blame*	*Definitely to blame*
Score 0	*Score 1*	*Score 2*	*Score 3*

The measure was named the Blame of Women Subjected to Sexual Violence and Abuse Scale (BOWSVA Scale) and consisted of 55 items depicting diverse sexual offences against women perpetrated by men, each with two sets of item responses to measure the assignment of blame. The BOWSVA was then put forward for the exploratory study of its properties, factors and validity.

Design

The development of items and item measurement was conducted using the Delphi methods described above. A cross-sectional online questionnaire was conducted with men and women living in the UK. Using LimeSurvey, an anonymous questionnaire matrix which had four sections was built for this study: demographics, BOWSVA scale for validation, U-IRMAS for concurrent validity and a free text section asking for comments on the topic and the experience of taking a study about blame in sexual offences (Appendix 3).

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was gained for this study from the University of Birmingham (see Appendix 2).

Recruitment

Participants were recruited from the general public using an open call for adult participants (18 years and over) to take part in an online, anonymous study about the perceptions of sexual offences. Adverts for the study were placed on three social media platforms (Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter), on the research participant platform 'Call for Participants' and in social media groups to aim for the most diverse sample possible. Online groups that gave permission for the advert to be posted included: a walking group (containing 1203 members), a fitness group (containing 2451 members), a professional networking group (containing 212 members) and a women's support group (containing 274 members). Each post encouraged members to share the call for participants with their own networks to maximise participation. The adverts asked for male and female participants over the age of 18 years old, who were living in the UK and contained a hyperlink to the study information sheet and the questionnaire. Once participants had read the information, they could make a choice whether to continue any further and to consent to participation.

There were 997 people who consented to take part, but only 456 people completed the study (i.e., answered all of the items), resulting in a completion rate of 45%. In 55% of cases, participants began to fill in the demographic questions but did not complete any of the scale items, and therefore all were deleted listwise. There were no cases that had minimal numbers of missing values that could have been addressed using missing value analysis and imputation (Kang, 2013). All cases that contained missing values included large sections of scales (50-80 items) or entire scales (132 items). Missing values were therefore not replaced as the study was about the personal attitudes of a diverse population and imputing estimated means

of such large amounts of missing data was not deemed appropriate for an initial principle components analysis on a new set of items.

Due to this, 541 (55%) participants with incomplete responses were removed before analysis took place. Missing data is common in factor analysis studies (Weaver & Maxwell, 2014). However, this study had a high amount of cases to delete and had there been a smaller sample size, concerns would have been raised about statistical power and the quality of the remaining data (Kang, 2013; Dong & Peng, 2013). Further, the cases that were deleted from analysis in the present study did not contain any answers on the scale items, which is arguably different from deleting cases in which participants answered most or some of the items and missed others randomly or non-randomly (Kang, 2013). In comparison with 114 exploratory factor analysis and principle component analysis studies, Anthoine et al. (2014) reported that 32% of studies reported the removal of responses due to high non-completion rates; but authors rarely detailed why or how they removed responses or handled missing data (Anthoine et al., 2013; Dong & Peng, 2013).

Sample size was important to this study and the aim was to achieve a subject to item ratio of at least 10. However, there are a range of views with regard to optimum subject to item ratios, with authors arguing that the optimum ration should be based on the needs of the individual study rather than on a stipulated number (Anthoine et al., 2014; Costello & Osborne, 2005; MacCallum et al., 1999). The desired ratio would have been surpassed had all 997 participants been included in the analysis. However, after 55% of participants were removed due to incomplete responses, this left the subject to item ratio at 8, which whilst considerably less than some others have suggested, is proposed as an optimum subject to item ratio by Cattell (1978) & Garsuch (1983). However, some authors have argued that instead of ratio,

researchers should aim for specific sample sizes such as 100 (Kline, 1979) and 250 (Cattell, 1978). More recently, Lee (1992) set out a rough estimate guide to sample sizes which did not use a ratio at all. Lee instead suggested that a sample size of 300 is ‘good’ and 500 is ‘very good’, with 1000 being considered ‘excellent’. With a ratio of 8 and a final sample size of 456, both supported in the literature as a good ratio and sample size, the sample was good enough to proceed with the factor analysis.

To further check the adequacy of the sample, additional tests were conducted to check whether the sample had enough variance that could be related to underlying factors. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .944 (‘marvellous’) and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was $p<.000$. Both findings demonstrate the sample is of good quality, valid and suitable for factor analysis.

Participants

Of the 456 people who completed the study, 247 (54%) were female, 205 (45%) were male and 4 (1%) identified as transgender. This does present a slight over representation of female participants as the ONS (2019) shows the current UK population is 51% female and 49% male. All participants were aged 18-75 years old. Of all participants, 366 were White British (80%), 33 were White Other (7%), 16 were Mixed/Multiple Ethnicity (4%), 13 were White Irish (3%), 7 were Asian Indian (2%), 4 were Asian Pakistani, 4 were Black British, 3 were other Asian heritage, 2 were Black African, 1 was Asian Bangladeshi, 1 was Black Caribbean, 1 was Arab and 5 selected ‘other ethnicity’. This data represents a diverse sample which is more diverse than the general population of the UK. According to the ONS (2019) 86% of the population is White British.

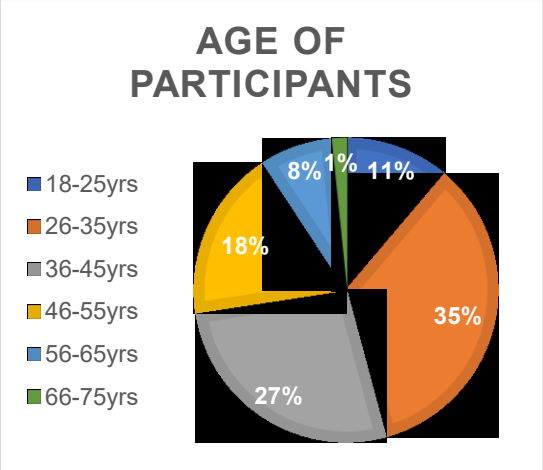

Figure 2: Age of participants

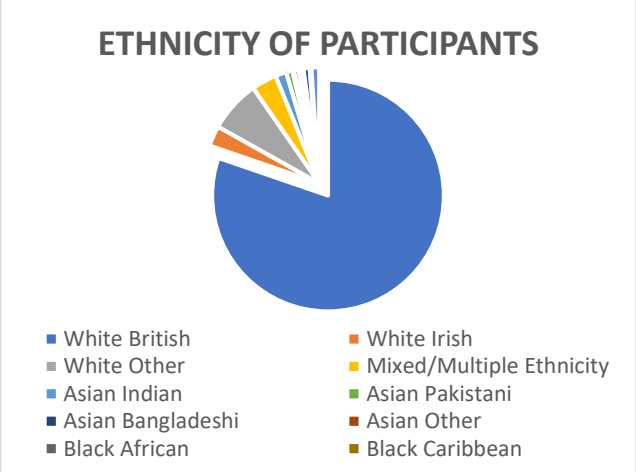

Figure 3: Ethnicity of study participants

Participants also had a range of educational levels with 78 participants educated up to the end of high school education (17%), 79 achieving a college or vocational qualification (17%), 139 educated up to and including a Bachelor's Degree (30%), 102 achieving post graduate certificates or Masters Degrees (22%), 26 achieving a PhD or Doctorate (6%) and 32 people preferred not to say (7%). When compared against the NOMIS (2012) and Census (2011) data, this sample has an over-representation of people with higher education degrees which national data reports to be between 27-40%.

Participants were also asked about their job roles to check for diversity of respondents and so job roles were listed as taken from national recruitment and employer website 'Indeed.com'. It was important to check this in case participants were found to be overwhelmingly from one sector that may have confounded the results. Participants had a wide range of job roles, and 61% had two or more job roles. This is significantly higher than current national statistics which report that around 20% of adults have two or more jobs (Coople, 2018).

Table 5: Job roles of participants

Job Role	Freq	%	Job Role	Freq	%
Retail	56	12	Agriculture	4	1
Construction	16	3.5	IT Services	36	8
Social Care	69	15	Administration	37	8
Transport	8	2	Emergency Services	15	3
Catering	18	4	Law	14	3
Medicine and Health	56	12	Beauty and Fashion	7	2
Psychology and Counselling	64	14	Prison and Probation	7	2
Finance	14	3	Business Owner	41	9
Education	91	20	Currently not working	54	12
Sales	29	6	Other job (not listed)	46	10
Sports and Fitness	6	1.5	Engineering	16	3.5
Politics	6	1.5			

Participants also had a range of religious affiliations and beliefs. The majority reported having no religion (53%) which is the same as the most recent national social attitudes surveys (BSA, 2017). In addition, 36% identified as Christian, 5% as Other, 2% as Buddhist and all other religions were less than 1.5%, which is very similar to the findings from the BSA (2017).

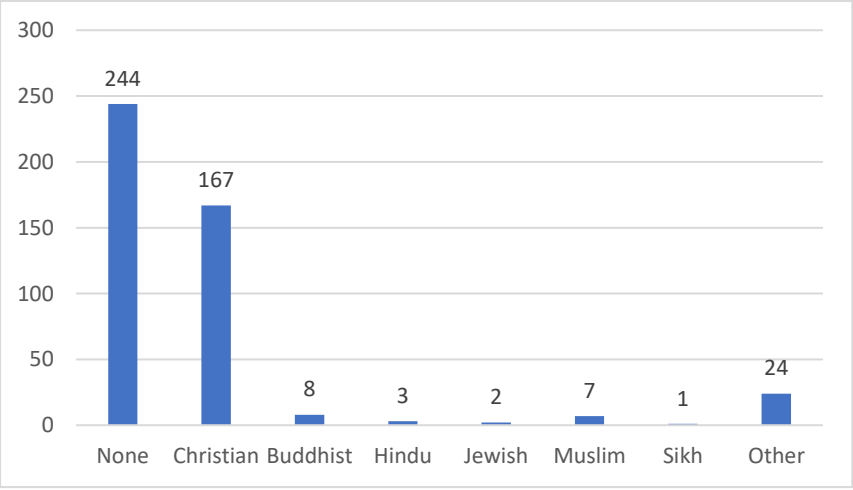

Figure 4: Religion of participants

Materials

Materials for this study included the information sheet that participants read before taking part, the informed consent declaration, demographic questions, 55 BOWSVA items, 22 U-IRMAS items and a participant feedback questionnaire. There was also a debrief sheet that participants read after taking part. Materials are contained in Appendix 3.

Procedure

This study was available online for an initial period of three months to collect an ideal sample of 500 participants. Participants were recruited from adverts posted in online groups and social media as described in previous section. Participants who responded to the advert were linked through to the information sheet and questionnaire held on questionnaire software 'Lime Survey' and invited to read information about the study before taking part (Appendix 3). Participants then indicated whether they consented to take part, set a personal identifier code (for use in the event of a participant wishing to confidentially withdraw their responses from the data before analysis) and proceeded with the questionnaire items. Participants were able to skip items and there were no mandatory questions. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were given the option to enter a prize-draw for one of 10 x £10 Amazon vouchers. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, participants were able to click a separate button which would redirect them to an independent form to submit their email address that was not connected to their questionnaire responses or demographic data. All participants were then redirected to debrief information (Appendix 3).

When 500 responses were achieved, the questionnaire data was examined and it was found that 70% of the sample were women, which was not adequate. The questionnaire was therefore left open and shared in the same places again, encouraging more men to take part. It was agreed with supervisors to leave the questionnaire open until the data became as equal as possible within another two-month period. After the two months had ended, the data sample was 997 and was 51% women and 49% men. The procedure for analysis began by eliminating 541 participants from the sample who did not answer all of the questions on the survey, leaving 456 participants as described in previous section. The first step of the analysis was to examine the response frequencies and distribution for each question. Recent research suggests that about 30-40% of the British public blame women for rape (Fawcett Society, 2017). Therefore, it was expected that the distribution of responses would not be normally distributed, and this is considered throughout the interpretation of results.

Results

Principal Component Analysis

The data from 456 participants were entered into a factor analysis using principal components analysis with oblique rotation to reach the optimum structure and understanding of the factors that make up the measurement of victim blaming. All 55 BOWSVA items were included to examine relationships and grouping of items into factors. A principal components analysis using direct oblimin rotation was utilised to analyse correlations between the items. Brown (2009, p.20) describes this process as seeking simple factor structures ‘with the goal of making the pattern loadings clearer or more pronounced’. An oblimin rotation was chosen as it was expected that the factors would be correlated (Costello & Osborne, 2009). Rather than solely

relying on the eigenvalue to assess factor solutions which were found to be an unreliable method (for review, see Costello & Osborne (2005)), an examination of the scree plot (as proposed by Cattell (1966) and supported by Costello & Osborne, 2005)) suggested that a solution for blame of women with between 5-7 factors. Based on this finding, a pattern matrix with 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 factors were calculated and analysed for the 'cleanest' factor solution (Costello & Osborne, 2005). However, to be certain, max factor solutions from direct oblimin rotation were also examined.

Components

The examination of the scree plot suggested a factor solution between 5 and 7 factors. All factor solutions from 4 to 9 were examined to check for the clearest solution with the least cross-loading or non-loading factors (Costello & Osborne, 2005). The seven-factor solution presented some items that cross-loaded or did not load above .32 and were therefore removed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). A total of 11 of the 55 items cross-loaded or did not load above .32, so they were removed. Principal components analysis, reliability tests and correlations were tested again on the remaining 44 items. The resulting solution is presented below and in appendix 5.

There were seven components:

1. Subscale 1 – She was asking for it
2. Subscale 2 – She was in a dangerous situation
3. Subscale 3 – She should have been more assertive
4. Subscale 4 – He was entitled to her body
5. Subscale 5 – The non-stereotypical sex offender
6. Subscale 6 – The stereotypical rape myth
7. Subscale 7 – She was a sexually active woman

Factor 1 'She was asking for it' – α = .833

The results from principal components analysis grouped these six items together, all of which position the woman as doing something that would be considered 'asking for it'. All items described women who took some form of action or made a decision that could be perceived as causing or encouraging sexual violence from men. All items positioned women as sexual, alluring or taking some form of perceived 'risk'. This factor is strongly supported by previous evidence from the literature, and items are similar in nature to AMMSA and U-IRMAS in places. From a linguistic perspective, it is also interesting to note the way items that describe women as sexy or talk about sex have grouped together in this component.

Table 6: Factor loading of subscale 1 items

Item code	Item	Loading
08	A woman chooses to walk home alone through a dangerous area because her bus failed to turn up. While doing so, she is sexually assaulted	.549
10	A woman goes out for the night wearing a sexy dress. While out she is touched on her breast as she walks past a man	.473
13	A woman gets so drunk that she keeps blacking out in a guy's flat. She wakes up the next morning naked and he tells her they had sex during the night.	.426
15	A woman in a nightclub is twerking on the dancefloor and kissing different men who she doesn't know. When she goes to the toilet, a man forces her into the cubicle and rapes her.	.472
19	A woman who is wearing revealing clothing is catcalled in the street by men who tell her to take her top off	.568
22	A woman who likes to dress sexily because it makes her feel good about herself is constantly sexually harassed by the men she works with	.459

Factor 2 'She was in a dangerous situation' – α = .833

This factor appears to group together items in which the woman is in a situation that could be perceived as dangerous or risky for her. Items loaded without any overlap with others and this subscale required no deletion of cross loading items. As many of

the items were situational, this presents a problem for explaining victim blaming in which the type of blame is not necessarily characterological or behavioural, but relates to the environment the woman was in, or the actions of others. This factor includes items in which the language is overt. Words such as ‘forced’, ‘raped’, ‘assaulted’, ‘threatened’ and ‘violent’ are used in these items and may have influenced the way participants responded to the scenarios. Despite there being overt mention of violence, rape and threat to the woman, participants still attributed blame to the women in the items.

Table 7: Factor loading of subscale 2 items

Item code	Item	Loading
06	A woman who has no class is sexually assaulted on a number of occasions by a friend	.534
09	A cheating woman is set up by her secret lover to be raped by one of his friends	.411
28	A bar maid who is very attractive, is slapped on her bottom whenever she walks past the door staff	.547
39	A woman who leaves her friends after an argument on a night out is raped on her way home	.663
41	A woman is raped by her brother in law. He threatens to shame her to her family and the community if she says anything.	.585
45	A woman is on a deserted train home and a stranger pushes her into the corner of the train and forces her hand into his trousers. She doesn’t say anything or do anything to stop him.	.583
47	A woman was walking her dog in the park when she is violently assaulted by a stranger and then raped multiple times behind some trees	.498
49	A woman is walking back from her local shop when she is held at knife point and forced to give oral sex to the perpetrator	.366

Factor 3 ‘She should have been more assertive’ – α = .854

The eight items in this component all relate to whether the woman said no, asserted herself or stopped the offences from happening. In every item that was grouped together in the analysis, the woman is positioned as submissive, trapped, unable to say no, manipulated or exploited. There is therefore a possibility that participants viewed these women as making free choices rather than being raped and assaulted. From a linguistic perspective, it is interesting to note that the words ‘rape’, ‘assault’,

'violent' or 'force' are absent from all items, and in every item, the woman is described as scared or submissive.

Table 8: Factor loading for subscale 3 items

Item code	Item	Loading
01	A woman performs unpleasant sexual acts that her husband has seen in porn films because he threatens to leave her if she doesn't	.756
29	A woman keeps receiving naked pictures from her work colleague but is too scared to tell him that she is not interested so he keeps sending them	.619
30	A woman has sexual comments made to her every morning by her neighbour. She feels there is nothing she can do about it and so has no choice but to accept his comments	.741
31	A woman who has never worked and therefore has no savings of her own stays with her sexually abusive husband	.707
33	A woman who has been homeless for months is offered somewhere to live if she performs sex acts on a number of men each night, so she moves in	.560
35	A woman really admires and loves her husband but when he's drunk, he tells her she must have sex with him even if she doesn't want to because she's his wife.	.528
43	A woman is groped by her boss but doesn't tell anyone because she's worried about losing her job	.596
44	A woman who is too scared to say no to her boyfriend lies still and closes her eyes until he has finished having sex with her.	.652

Factor 4 'He was entitled to her body' – α = .693

The three items in this component relate to sleeping or unconscious women. Participants tended to respond in similar ways to these items and they were grouped together in the analysis. Possibly, this is because there is a perceived 'grey area' around having sex with a long-term partner who is sleeping, unwell or not aroused. All items talked about husbands, boyfriends or partners explicitly; which also may have influenced the way participants responded to the item because the perpetrator was their partner.

Table 9: Factor loading for subscale 4 items

Item code	Item	Loading
14	A woman tells her boyfriend that she wants to have sex with him but she starts to feel unwell and falls asleep on the sofa. She wakes up to find him performing oral sex on her	.401
24	A woman is having sex with her partner and wants to stop because she is no longer aroused but her partner forces her to continue	.481
25	A woman wakes up to find her husband very turned on and touching her vagina whilst she was asleep	.664

Factor 5 'The non-stereotypical sex offender' – α = .758

These items were deliberately designed to test whether participants responded differently to victim blaming when the male offender was described as handsome or vulnerable. This presents the offender in a non-stereotypical way and could have therefore influenced the way participants responded and caused the items to be grouped together in the components analysis. However, whilst the description of the man was manipulated to be non-stereotypical by describing him as vulnerable, upset, handsome or in need of support, the language used to describe the offence still contained overt words such as 'force', 'threaten', 'rape', 'assault'. Nonetheless, the description of the man as non-stereotypical seemed to group these items together, meaning that victim blaming of women may be affected when the male perpetrator does not fit the stereotype of the sex offender.

Table 10: Factor loadings for subscale 5 items

Item code	Item	Loading
34	A woman goes out for a date with a really attractive man from college. He threatens to tell everyone at college that she's had sex with him if she doesn't give him a blowjob	.588
51	A woman was the last person getting off the bus at night when the bus driver, who had just received the news that he was being made redundant, held her down and groped her	.683
53	A woman was at a house party when she realised she had been drugged. She went to seek help but was pulled into a bedroom and raped by a male friend who was also high on drugs	.376
54	A woman was in the unisex showers at her new gym when a man who had been talking to her about his marriage breakdown walks in. He obstructs her only exit and sexually assaults her	.633
55	A woman was studying in the library when a man starts to tell her about how depressed he is since his business went bust. She listens to him and he asks her if she is single and when she tells him that she is not interested, he forces his hand up her top.	.396

Factor 6 The stereotypical rape myth – α = .785

In this component, items that represented the stereotypical rape myth appeared to group together in the analysis. In all items presented below, the women were described as outside of their homes, alone and feminine or sexual. All men were strangers or acquaintances and all offences were public, forced or overtly violent. When these factors are added together, they represent the 'classic rape' as suggested by Williams, (1984). These items appeared to group together because they elicited low levels of blame and many participants responded in the same way to these items.

Table 11: Factor loadings for subscale 6 items

Item code	Item	Loading
23	A beautiful woman with a curvaceous figure is on the tube when a man rubs his groin up against her	.522
27	A woman who was wearing a clingy dress instead of the appropriate clothing in her community is raped on her way to a family gathering	.757
37	A woman who makes a real effort with her appearance is suddenly pushed against a wall by a work colleague at a party who then kisses her	.516
46	A woman is outside of her home when she is approached by a man in a car who stops to ask her for directions. As she gives the directions, she is dragged into the car by the man and then raped.	.716
50	A woman had just finished an evening board meeting when she is knocked unconscious in a multi-storey carpark and is sexually assaulted	.490

Factor 7 'She was a sexually active woman' – α = .875

The final factor appears to group all items in which the woman is described or positioned as sexually active or sexually liberal. These items elicited some of the highest amounts of blame and many participants answered these items in the same way. From a linguistic perspective, there is no mention of the words rape, assault, threaten or violent – but the word or concept of being forced is frequent. However, this appears to be negated by the sexual descriptions of the women who are

described as flirting, working in a brothel, sending naked selfies, being sexually exploited for drugs, making sex tapes, working as glamour models or reality TV stars. These items are grouped together because the women are positioned as sexually active and this may have caused judgement or lack of empathy from participants; with between a fifth and a half of participants attributed blame to the woman in all of these items.

Table 12: Factor loadings for subscale 7 items

Item code	Item	Loading
04	A woman has been flirting with a man all night long. She is groped by him against her will as she tries to leave the club	.467
12	A woman chooses to go back to the hotel bar with a man she just met while out for the night. In the taxi on the way to the hotel, he forces his hand up her skirt even though she asked him not to.	.372
16	A woman working in a brothel as a sex worker is forced to have anal sex by a client	.551
17	A woman sends a lot of naked pictures and videos of herself to a guy she is dating from work. Using the pictures, he then blackmails her into kissing and masturbating him	.412
18	A woman is forced to have sex with lots of men to pay off her drug debts	.532
20	A woman who enjoys the attention she gets as a famous glamour model has her skirt lifted up and her vagina touched by a man in a restaurant	.511
21	A woman who shot to fame as a reality TV star finds that the paparazzi have published up-skirt photos of her at an event	.755
36	A woman makes a sex tape with her boyfriend but then finds out he's shared it with his mates without her knowing	.406
38	A sex worker who only offers her clients a "hand job" or a "blow job" is forced to have vaginal sex with a client	.547

Internal Consistency

Internal consistency of the blame of women items was measured using Cronbach's alpha (1957) and resulted in $\alpha = .895$

Individual item frequencies and means

To obtain descriptive statistics, each participant was assigned a summed score representing how much blame they had apportioned to the woman on each of the 44 items. The total score for each subscale varied depending on how many items were

on each component. The total score that could be obtained by a participant who assigned full blame to the women, was 132. This section explores the frequencies of victim blaming of women in each subscale and item.

Subscale 1: Asking for it

Subscale 1 has a mean participant score of 3 out of 27, a mode of 0 and a range of 26. The mean is not a useful measure in this instance, as the scores from 41.9% of participants who did not blame the woman averages out the scores from the other 58.1% who did blame the woman, with a small number of participants blaming the woman almost totally for every item, scoring 26 out of 27. The blame assigned by the group of 456 participants varied considerably depending on the content of the items. Item 13 resulted in 42% of participants assigning blame to the woman for being raped whilst drunk, this is likely to be related to rape myths and victim blaming when women drink alcohol (Romero-Sanchez et al., 2017). Item 19 and 22 both reference the way the woman is dressed and resulted in high levels of victim blaming of the woman with 30% and 32% blaming the woman, respectively.

All women described in this subscale were assigned some blame and were all described to be dressed in revealing clothing, dancing in clubs, walking alone or drinking.

Table 13: Subscale 1 item frequencies[1]

Item code	Item	Mean	Mode	SD	No blame %	Blame %
08	A woman chooses to walk home alone through a dangerous area because her bus failed to turn up. While doing so, she is sexually assaulted	.22	0	.593	82.2	17.8
10	A woman goes out for the night wearing a sexy dress. While out she is touched on her breast as she walks past a man	.15	0	.480	86.0	14
13	A woman gets so drunk that she keeps blacking out in a guy's flat. She wakes up the next morning naked and he tells her they had sex during the night.	.56	0	.805	59.2	41.8
15	A woman in a nightclub is twerking on the dancefloor and kissing different men who she doesn't know. When she goes to the toilet, a man forces her into the cubicle and rapes her.	.33	0	.684	75.0	25
19	A woman who is wearing revealing clothing is catcalled in the street by men who tell her to take her top off	.39	0	.733	70.2	29.8
22	A woman who likes to dress sexily because it makes her feel good about herself is constantly sexually harassed by the men she works with	.39	0	.684	68.6	31.4

Subscale 2: She was in a dangerous situation

Subscale 2 has a mean participant score of 0.7, a mode of 0 and a range of 21. The mean and mode are almost zero, as the majority of participants did not assign blame to the women in the scenarios. However, 29.4% of participants did assign blame to women in these scenarios, with a small number of participants with scores of 20 and 21, out of a total of 24, indicating that they blamed the woman wholly or partially in every scenario on this subscale. Generally, however, items on this subscale saw much lower levels of blame than subscale 1 and tended to contain more stranger

[1] Responses from participants have been collapsed into to categories of 'no blame' and 'blame'. 'Blame' contains the item responses 'the woman is probably to blame' and 'the woman is definitely to blame'. 'No Blame' contains the item responses 'the woman is probably not to blame' and 'the woman is definitely not to blame'. This is the same for all tables and results in this chapter.

attacks, violent rapes and stereotypical examples of assault. All items describe a situation in which women may be asked ‘what did you expect to happen?’ or would be questioned about why they were in a risky or dangerous situation or environment alone. The three items that resulted in the most blame of women despite the stereotypical attacks were all items in which the woman was described negatively as having no class, cheating on her partner or doing nothing to stop the assaults.

Table 14: Subscale 2 item frequencies

Item code	Item	Mean	Mode	SD	No blame %	Blame %
06	A woman who has no class is sexually assaulted on a number of occasions by a friend	0.10	0	.391	88.8	12.2
09	A cheating woman is set up by her secret lover to be raped by one of his friends	0.13	0	.499	88.6	12.4
28	A bar maid who is very attractive, is slapped on her bottom whenever she walks past the door staff	.10	0	.409	89.9	10.1
39	A woman who leaves her friends after an argument on a night out is raped on her way home	0.08	0	.376	90.6	9.4
41	A woman is raped by her brother in law. He threatens to shame her to her family and the community if she says anything.	0.07	0	.394	92.5	7.5
45	A woman is on a deserted train home and a stranger pushes her into the corner of the train and forces her hand into his trousers. She doesn’t say anything or do anything to stop him.	0.21	0	.576	82.9	17.1
47	A woman was walking her dog in the park when she is violently assaulted by a stranger and then raped multiple times behind some trees	0.04	0	.290	95.2	4.8
49	A woman is walking back from her local shop when she is held at knife point and forced to give oral sex to the perpetrator	0.05	0	.370	93.6	6.4

Subscale 3: She should have been more assertive

Subscale 3 has a mean participant score of 5, a mode of 0 and a range of 24. Overall, this indicates that items on this subscale resulted in some of the highest and most consistent victim blaming of the woman. Only 20.4% of participants assigned no blame to the woman and scored zero on this subscale, with all other participants assigning partial or full blame to the woman. All items on this subscale position the woman as submissive, unable to say no or trapped in a situation or assault that she cannot escape. Items also include manipulation, blackmail and intimidation of women to perform sex acts or to be continually sexually assaulted. These features appear to have elicited much higher levels of blame from the participant group with over 75% of items in this subscale scoring high levels of blame of women. In this subscale, the issue appears to be about the woman's agency and lack of power in the sexual offence, which increased the amount she was blamed; because she did not assert herself or stop the offences, she was blamed by the participants.

Table 15: Subscale 3 item frequencies

Item code	Item	Mean	Mode	SD	No blame %	Blame %
01	A woman performs unpleasant sexual acts that her husband has seen in porn films because he threatens to leave her if she doesn't	0.4	0	.753	69.5	30.5
29	A woman keeps receiving naked pictures from her work colleague but is too scared to tell him that she is not interested so he keeps sending them	0.61	0	.906	60.3	29.7
30	A woman has sexual comments made to her every morning by her neighbour. She feels there is nothing she can do about it and so has no choice but to accept his comments	0.36	0	.739	73.5	26.5
31	A woman who has never worked and therefore has no savings of her own stays with her sexually abusive husband	0.47	0	.829	66.9	33.1

33	A woman who has been homeless for months is offered somewhere to live if she performs sex acts on a number of men each night, so she moves in	0.72	0	.967	55.5	45.5
35	A woman really admires and loves her husband but when he's drunk he tells her she must have sex with him even if she doesn't want to because she's his wife.	.12	0	.442	87.3	12.7
43	A woman is groped by her boss but doesn't tell anyone because she's worried about losing her job	0.22	0	.643	82.7	17.3
44	A woman who is too scared to say no to her boyfriend lies still and closes her eyes until he has finished having sex with her.	0.47	0	.815	67.8	32.2

Subscale 4: He was entitled to her body

This subscale only has three items, but they did not load onto any other factor and all contained the description of a sleeping or non-consenting woman. Subscale 4 has a mean participant score of 0.7, a mode of 0 and a range of 9. This means that whilst 62.9% of participants assigned no blame to the woman in any of the scenarios 37.1% of participants assigned blame to the woman, despite her being asleep or not being aroused enough to have sex. A small number of participants (5%) assigned full or almost full blame to the women in all three scenarios. As the woman is asleep or clearly non-consenting, it is not reasonable to assume behaviour or characterological blame – but that 37.1% of participants blamed her for some other reason. The items appear to describe a partner who is not concerned about the woman, but feels they are able to sexually abuse or rape their partner even if they do not want sex or are unable to have conscious or consensual sex. These items appear to be about male entitlement to sex with their partners or to touching her body even when she does not want it or cannot consent to it.

Table 16: Subscale 4 item frequencies

Item code	Item	Mean	Mode	SD	No blame %	Blame %
14	A woman tells her boyfriend that she wants to have sex with him but she starts to feel unwell and falls asleep on the sofa. She wakes up to find him performing oral sex on her	.26	0	.611	78.3	21.7
24	A woman is having sex with her partner and wants to stop because she is no longer aroused but her partner forces her to continue	.27	0	.589	76.8	23.2
25	A woman wakes up to find her husband very turned on and touching her vagina whilst she was asleep	.18	0	.481	81.1	19.9

Subscale 5: The non-stereotypical sex offender

The items in this subscale appear to have been grouped based on the behaviour and character of the offender, rather than the behaviour or character of the woman. This subscale has a mean participant score of 0.3, a mode of 0 and a range of 12. 83.1% of participants assigned no blame to the woman and scored zero. 16.9% of participants assigned partial blame to the woman, with none of the participants assigning full blame to the woman. These items were designed to explore whether victim blaming would change if the offender in the scenario was described in a non-stereotypical way, for example as vulnerable, helpless or handsome. Despite the offender being described as non-stereotypical, the blame of the woman remained low. It is of interest that whilst the description of the offender had been manipulated to elicit sympathy or understanding, the items still contained overt language about the offence such as ‘threaten’, ‘held down’, ‘raped’, ‘assault’ and ‘forced’. It is interesting that the items that were designed to explore the perception of the non-

stereotypical offender grouped together in the analysis, but more research is needed to understand how this links to the blame of the woman.

Table 17: Subscale 5 item frequencies

Item code	Item	Mean	Mode	SD	No blame %	Blame %
34	A woman goes out for a date with a really attractive man from college. He threatens to tell everyone at college that she's had sex with him if she doesn't give him a blowjob	.13	0	.501	88.6	11.4
51	A woman was the last person getting off the bus at night when the bus driver, who had just received the news that he was being made redundant, held her down and groped her	.06	0	.384	92.5	7.5
53	A woman was at a house party when she realised she had been drugged. She went to seek help but was pulled into a bedroom and raped by a male friend who was also high on drugs	0.07	0	.392	92.8	7.2
54	A woman was in the unisex showers at her new gym when a man who had been talking to her about his marriage breakdown walks in. He obstructs her only exit and sexually assaults her	0.05	0	.303	91.7	8.3
55	A woman was studying in the library when a man starts to tell her about how depressed he is since his business went bust. She listens to him and he asks her if she is single and when she tells him that she is not interested, he forces his hand up her top.	0.05	0	.339	93.2	6.8

Subscale 6: The stereotypical rape myth

Items that grouped together to form subscale 6 appear to be related to the classic rape stereotype. In these items, the woman was either alone or described as sexual. All of the women were attacked outside of the home environment and all of the offences were violent, forceful or public in nature. None of the offenders were partners or family members, with most being strangers or acquaintances. Therefore, the items contain many of the rape myths arising from the classic rape stereotype. Subscale 6 had a mean participant score of 0.5, a mode of 0 and a range of 23.

78.1% of participants assigned no blame to the woman and scored zero, causing another mode and mean of zero. However, 21.9% of participants assigned blame to the woman, despite the items conforming to the stereotypical rape myth. It is interesting to note that all women in the scenarios were travelling somewhere or were away from home, as if this was a salient factor, it would mean that women living independent lives was a factor in victim blaming of women.

Table 18: Subscale 6 item frequencies

Item code	Item	Mean	Mode	SD	No blame %	Blame %
23	A beautiful woman with a curvaceous figure is on the tube when a man rubs his groin up against her	0.04	0	.280	93.2	6.8
27	A woman who was wearing a clingy dress instead of the appropriate clothing in her community is raped on her way to a family gathering	0.1	0	.400	89.7	10.3
37	A woman who makes a real effort with her appearance is suddenly pushed against a wall by a work colleague at a party who then kisses her	0.1	0	.404	89.3	10.7
46	A woman is outside of her home when she is approached by a man in a car who stops to ask her for directions. As she gives the directions, she is dragged into the car by the man and then raped.	0.06	0	.372	93.2	6.8
50	A woman had just finished an evening board meeting when she is knocked unconscious in a multi-storey carpark and is sexually assaulted	0.05	0	.341	93.6	6.4

Subscale 7: Sexually active woman

The final subscale relates to women who are sexually active or sexually liberal. Subscale 7 has a mean participant score of 4, a mode of 0 and a range of 27. Only 36.2% of participants assigned no blame to the woman and scored zero. The remaining 63.8% of participants assigned partial or full blame to the women in these

items. In items in this subscale, women were described as enjoying or engaging in sex acts, taking sexual images, making sex tapes or being sexually exploited. This subscale also contains the item which resulted in the most blame (item 17) due to the woman taking selfies that were subsequently used to blackmail her. Despite the clear description of the blackmail, over half of the participants still assigned blame to the woman in the item. Due to the way these items grouped together in analysis, it is probable that the component relates to blaming women for being sexually active, ultimately blaming the woman for being 'easy' or 'promiscuous' and therefore to blame for any sexual violence perpetrated against her.

Table 19: Subscale 7 item frequencies

Item code	Item	Mean	Mode	SD	No blame %	Blame %
04	A woman has been flirting with a man all night long. She is groped by him against her will as she tries to leave the club	0.41	0	.727	68.4	31.6
12	A woman chooses to go back to the hotel bar with a man she just met while out for the night. In the taxi on the way to the hotel, he forces his hand up her skirt even though she asked him not to.	0.23	0	.575	80.3	19.7
16	A woman working in a brothel as a sex worker is forced to have anal sex by a client	0.33	0	.686	74.3	25.7
17	A woman sends a lot of naked pictures and videos of herself to a guy she is dating from work. Using the pictures, he then blackmails her into kissing and masturbating him	0.71	0	.937	54.2	55.8
18	A woman is forced to have sex with lots of men to pay off her drug debts	0.46	0	.811	67.5	32.5
20	A woman who enjoys the attention she gets as a famous glamour model has her skirt lifted up and her vagina touched by a man in a restaurant	.18	0	.552	84.4	15.6
21	A woman who shot to fame as a reality TV star finds that the paparazzi have published up-skirt photos of her at an event	.30	0	.674	76.3	23.7
36	A woman makes a sex tape with her boyfriend but then finds out he's shared it with his mates without	.51	0	.835	65.6	34.4

	her knowing					
38	A sex worker who only offers her clients a “hand job” or a “blow job” is forced to have vaginal sex with a client	.25	0	.584	78.9	21.1

Comparing differences between participant responses to BOWSVA items

There was no significant difference between male and female participant scores on the overall BOWSVA scores, $t(454) = 1.56$, $p = .118$. Males had a mean score of 12.22 (*SD* = 17.02) and females had a mean score of 9.87 (*SD* = 12.50). This means that male and female participants did not differ in their attribution of blame towards the female victims of sexual offences. While the sample size was large enough to perform an independent samples t-test (Hanna and Dempster, 2012), due to the abnormal distribution of the data, this finding was checked with a Mann Whitney U test and further Kruskal-Wallis test (due to participants being able to select ‘other’ as their sex, producing three groups for comparison). The findings from the Kruskal-Wallis test were also non-significant and no difference in blaming was found between sexes, $H(2) = 2.68$, $p = .261$, with a mean rank for females of 208.20, males of 217.53 and other of 124.50.

Further testing on the mean summed scores for subscales of the BOWSVA returned no significant differences between sexes, except for on subscale 4 in which male and female participants did respond differently to the items describing women who were asleep, unwell or unconscious.

Table 20: Difference between male and female participant scores for each BOWSVA subscale

Subscale	Sex	Mean	SD	*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Subscale 1 – She was asking for it	**Female**	1.78	2.61	1.81	454	**.070**
	Male	2.31	3.33			
Subscale 2 – She was in a dangerous situation	**Female**	0.52	4.13	2.38	454	**.018**
	Male	1.07	4.70			
Subscale 3 – She should have been more assertive	**Female**	3.46	1.15	.392	454	**.696**
	Male	3.30	1.51			
Subscale 4 – He was entitled to her body	**Female**	0.53	4.01	.292	454	**.004**
	Male	0.91	5.06			
Subscale 5 – The non-stereotypical sex offender	**Female**	0.32	1.02	.130	454	**.897**
	Male	0.34	1.51			
Subscale 6 – The stereotypical rape myth	**Female**	0.32	1.32	.274	454	**.784**
	Male	0.36	1.29			
Subscale 7 – She was a sexually active woman	**Female**	2.97	1.79	1.89	454	**.059**
	Male	3.84	2.73			

Note: After post hoc Bonferroni correction, the p value was set at p < .007 and all values remained non-significant at the adjusted level with the exception of subscale 4

As the data was abnormally distributed, a further Kruskal-Wallis test was completed which resulted in no significant differences between the sexes on any of the subscales, including subscale 4 which showed as significantly different using the independent samples t-test. Full results of the Kruskal-Wallis test can be found in Appendix 7.

Concurrent Validity: The relationship between victim blaming and the U-IRMAS

Analysis was conducted to explore the concurrent validity with the overall items and then subscales of the Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (U-IRMAS). The total scores from all items were summed from both the BOWSVA and U-IRMAS to explore any correlation. The sum total of the 44 BOWSVA items positively correlated with the sum total of the 22 U-IRMAS items, Spearman's rho = .652, $p < 0.01$.

The summed scores of the subscales were then analysed to explore whether there were any relationships between the subscale scores from the BOWSVA and U-IRMAS. Analysis then focussed on the subscales (see Table 21). First, the correlation with the overall U-IRMAS score and each individual BOWSVA subscale

was examined which found a range of positive correlations from moderate to strong. The strongest relationships between the BOWSVA subscales and the overall U-IRMAS score were BOWSVA subscales 1, 3 and 7.

Table 21: Individual BOWSVA subscales correlation with overall U-IRMAS score

Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient two tailed analysis

	BOWSVA subscale	Correlation (Spearman's Rho) result with overall U-IRMAS score
1	She was asking for it	.621**
2	She was in a dangerous situation	.455**
3	She should have been more assertive	.555**
4	He was entitled to her body	.476**
5	The non-stereotypical offender	.249**
6	The stereotypical rape myth	.340**
7	She is a sexually active woman	.601**

*** After post hoc Bonferroni correction, the p value was set at p < .001 and all values remained significant at the corrected level Note: Strong correlations over 0.5 are highlighted*

The second analysis was a more in-depth look at each individual subscale from both measures. The scores were summed for the subscales in both the BOWSVA and the U-IRMAS and then explored with Spearman's correlation for non-parametric data. In this case, the way the subscales relate to each other may be able to tell us how the scores on the U-IRMAS are related to victim blaming specifically. Correlations over 0.3 are deemed to be moderate and correlations over 0.5 are considered to be strong. In order to evaluate statistical significance, the alpha level was Bonferroni corrected and set to .007 to control for the multiple comparisons being made. The U-IRMAS subscale 'she asked for it' correlated strongly with BOWSVA subscales 'she was asking for it', 'she should have been more assertive' and 'she is a sexually active woman'. U-IRMAS subscale 'she lied' correlated strongly with BOWSVA subscale 'she was asking for it' and 'she is a sexually active woman'.

Table 22: BOWSVA subscales correlation with U-IRMAS subscales

Spearmans Rho correlation coefficient two-tailed analysis

	U-IRMAS SUBSCALES SPEARMANS R VALUE				
		She asked for it	**He didn't mean to**	**It wasn't really rape**	**She lied**
BOWSVA SUBSCALES	**She was asking for it**	.652**	.459**	.493**	.516**
	She was in a dangerous situation	.484**	.349**	.416**	.379**
	She should have been more assertive	.546**	.432**	.475**	.462**
	He was entitled to her body	.462**	.379**	.398**	.401**
	The non-stereotypical offender	.255**	.186**	.279**	.227**
	The stereotypical rape myth	.328**	.273**	.312**	.336**
	She is a sexually active woman	.606**	.417**	.463**	.534**

*** significant at 0.01 level two tailed Note: Strong correlations over 0.5 are highlighted*

Note: After post hoc Bonferroni correction, the p value was set at p < .001 and all values remained significant at the corrected level

Other correlations that were just under 0.5 can be seen between three key BOWSVA subscales and all U-IRMAS subscales. The most prominent BOWSVA subscales 'she was asking for it', 'she should have been more assertive' and 'she is a sexually active woman', all correlated strongly with all U-IRMAS subscales at over 0.5 or just under 0.5. This suggests that RMA may strongly correlate with these three assumptions or beliefs about women subjected to sexual violence: that she asked for it, that she should have been more assertive or that she is promiscuous for being previously sexually active.

Participant feedback

At the end of the study, all participants were invited to give feedback on the experience of taking part and to give any thoughts about the method, topic and their own personal experience of answering the questions.

Out of a total of 456 participants, 281 left anonymous feedback which varied considerably. A thematic analysis of the comments was conducted, exploring the frequency of phrases and words used by participants.

Table 23: Percentage of themes in comments left in questionnaire feedback

Comment themes	%	Example
Positive comments about taking part	24	'Really glad I did this, very eye-opening.'
Negative comments about taking part	15	'Too long, depressing study…'
Mixed comments about taking part	9	'It is a really good study but it took ages to complete and was small on the screen.'
It was hard to decide who was to blame	26	'It really forced me to think about who was to blame. I struggled with some where I thought they were both to blame.'
Employed rape myths in the comment	7	'I chose this answer because women do actually lie about rape often.'
Personal disclosures	3	'This happened to me. I was blamed for being raped when I was 14'
Personal abuse towards researcher	3	'The researcher is an (expletive) and I hope she fails her PhD.'
What about men?	8	'Why isn't this study about men? Men are victims too.'
Comments about study design	6	'The study is biased because it only focusses on women. This study would be better if it included men.'

Participant feedback demonstrated a mixture of experiences of the study. Of interest was the 26% of participants who commented that they found the assignment of blame to be difficult because they felt both parties were to blame. This is useful for questionnaire studies about victim blaming attitudes, as it appears that over a quarter of participants did not find the study easy to complete which may influence answers and findings. It may also teach us more about the nature of victim blaming and warrants further exploration.

The free text question specifically asked about the study design (to check for display, language, accessibility and understanding issues that could be improved in future). However, only 6% of participants gave feedback of this nature, with the rest of the feedback being based on the categories above. This included people who left comments supporting rape myths (7%).

It is important to note that 15% left comments about the impact of the study being negative, 9% left mixed comments about the impact of the study and 3% left personal disclosures of sexual violence and victim blaming. This should raise further ethical considerations and questions for all researchers in forensic psychology about the safety and wellbeing of all participants.

As shown in Table 23, there were around 14 comments (3%) left by participants that were personally abusive towards me, as the researcher. These were discussed with supervisors and further clinical supervision was sought to talk about the comments. Despite the comments, the answers provided did not differ significantly from other participants and did not warrant exclusion from the dataset. This was in addition to the 8% of comments which asked about the 'exclusion' of men as victims, despite the introduction to the study explicitly linking to the work of Emma Sleath on the victim blaming of men subjected to sexual violence. Together, most of these 11% of comments were focussed on the misunderstanding that feminist research ignores or minimises the harm and abuse of men and boys, which caused some participants to leave angry comments about feminism, me as a person and the concept of a study that only explored the victim blaming of women.

Discussion

This chapter presents a detailed account of the process of exploring previous measures that have been used to draw conclusions about victim blaming of women, the development of new items to measure victim blaming of women and the tests conducted to explore the responses from a general public sample. The findings should be treated as initial findings about a scale in its infancy, requiring further research replicate the results and determine the validity and reliability of BOWSVA.

That aside, much can be learned from this study. This study included a thorough explanation of the mapping of previous measures, the development and face validity of new items that directly measure victim blaming. This process demonstrated the importance of language use when constructing new items to ask people about blame in sexual violence and detailed the steps taken to develop and test the items. Psychometric measures heavily rely on valid and consistent language use (Clark & Watson, 1995), but the initial mapping of the items in existing measures showed that conclusions about victim blaming were being drawn from measures that did not specifically ask participants about blame. In some cases, language was mixed up and fault, cause, blame and responsibility became synonymous. As McMahon & Farmer (2011) demonstrated, language in psychometric measures about sexual violence and attitudes towards women can become dated quickly and requires critical reflection and change. This concern was what led this study to focus so much on whether the language in the new items was balanced, biased, dated, clear, appropriate and valid. Whilst this did lead to seven versions of the items that were checked and re-checked by an expert group, this was methodologically transparent and sound, especially as authors such as Anthoine et al. (2014) argued that many

new psychometric measure development papers did not detail how they developed the items used in their measures, concentrating more on the factor analysis.

The principal components analysis indicated a seven-factor solution to the victim blaming of women, suggesting the attribution of blame of women can be explained by seven key factors: (1) whether the woman is perceived to be 'asking for it'; (2) whether she was in a 'dangerous situation'; (3) whether she was 'assertive' enough to say no or stop the offender; (4) whether she was in a relationship with a man who felt he was entitled to sex or to her body; (5) whether the offender was stereotypical enough to be seen as a sex offender; (6) whether the entire offence, victim and offender conformed to the societal rape myth constructs; and (7) whether the woman was sexually active or sexually liberal before the offence or at the time of the offence.

These new suggested factors of victim blaming present a new way of understanding the reasons why participants might assign blame to women subjected to sexual violence. Despite all the items describing illegal sexual offences against women, none of the items resulted in zero blame being apportioned to the female victim. The factors also demonstrate the diversity of possible reasons for victim blaming which include scales about the woman's behaviour and character hailing from gender role stereotypes, sexism and misogyny (she was asking for it, she was not assertive enough and she was sexually active or sexually liberal), scales about the situation the woman was in, (the situation was dangerous or risky), stereotypes and rape myths already established in the literature (the offender was non-stereotypical and the rape conforms to rape myths) and finally, male entitlement to women's bodies when in relationships which supports work on token resistance, sexualisation and objectification of women and feminist approaches to male violence (he was entitled

to her body). This factor structure appears to bring together many of the prevailing theories of victim blaming.

Findings presented evidence that the data sample was of good quality and despite producing abnormally distributed data, the new BOWSVA scale has a clear factor structure and demonstrates strong construct and face validity, internal consistency and concurrent validity with the U-IRMAS (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). Results showed that three key BOWSVA subscales correlate strongly with U-IMRAS overall scores and subscale scores:

- She was asking for it
- She should have been more assertive
- She is a sexually active woman

These findings add new evidence to the literature and suggest that victim blaming of women should not be conflated with RMA and supports the argument that it should be treated as a separate, but related, concept (Dawry et al., 2019). The three key subscales may also reveal some important values the public hold about women subjected to sexual violence, in that they are either asking for it, that they should have fought off their attacker better or that they are promiscuous. It was also of interest that this study presents data that male and female participants did not differ significantly in the amount of blame they assigned to women subjected to sexual violence, supporting previous findings of this nature (Viki & Abrams, 2002; Gerber et al., 2004).

This study presents the initial exploration, development and testing of 44 items of the BOWSVA scale, which aims to be able to directly measure the attribution of blame to women subjected to sexual violence and the male perpetrators who committed the

offences. The focus on blame in the items and in the item response options avoids the conflation with responsibility, cause, fault and blame as discussed earlier; and means that the measure does what it set out to do. The results have been enlightening and important to our understanding of victim blaming of women subjected to sexual violence, but there are some limitations when developing a measure such as this one.

One of the major limitations from a psychometric perspective is that the data were not normally distributed. Answers were skewed. On most items, the majority of the participants did not blame the woman (although this varied considerably). This led to data that was not normally distributed, whilst many of the methods used in factor analysis and psychometric development assume or rely on the data being normally distributed. Thus, violations of these assumptions could have affected the results of the component analysis or the interpretation of correlations. However, the abnormal distribution of data represents the real responses of real participants, and it is not ethical to simply remove the responses that do not fit the bell curve, as this would mean changing the data to fit a preconceived idea of how we want it to behave. It also means that we are no longer analysing the responses of a whole group of people, but only the ones that fit within our presupposed norms. As this study focusses on such a harmful attitude towards women subjected to sexual violence and would have been influenced by many different structures, cultural norms, myths and even socially desirable responses, it should be expected to see data that is abnormally distributed. It would be naïve to expect such a divisive social topic as ‘are women to blame for sexual violence?’ to result in normally distributed responses. Instead of transforming the data, non-parametric tests as well as parametric were utilised to examine the data, which indicated a similar pattern of findings.

The second limitation is related to one of the strengths of this study: language. Whilst the language was carefully considered and manipulated in the items, there were many variations in the way the items were written which could influence the way the participants attributed blame. The language in the items was found to influence the responses by participants and in some components, language seemed to group the items together. For example, items frequently grouped together based on whether overt language was used to describe the offence, which supports previous findings by Donde et al., (2018) and Gerber et al. (2004). This finding requires further exploration as language alone may have changed the responses of participants, which would change the component analysis and the way the items correlated with each other. What would be useful is a further study that could explore whether the pattern with overt versus more subtle language to describe different sexual offences can cause a variation in how much blame is attributed to women subjected to sexual violence. Findings from that study could then inform how future items and experiment materials could be developed and tested in wider studies which ask people about perceptions and attitudes towards sexual violence, to try to account for confounding variables arising from the selection of language.

Related to the complexities arising from language is the translation of items to other languages in order to test whether the BOWSVA factor structure is sound for other populations, groups of people, cultures and languages. This is a difficult task for any psychometric measure due to how much the properties and performance of the items is so heavily reliant on the way participants perceive and respond to the specific language used to construct the item. All participants in this study spoke English as a first language, but although they spoke the same language, this does not necessarily mean that they all interpreted the meaning of the items in the same

way. There is likely variance in the way in which items are understood both within and between languages. Whilst this is a difficult task, it is valuable and worthy of future exploration. There is planned work for the future to test this measure in different countries of English speakers before moving on to test translated versions of this measure in other countries. This has been successfully achieved by Xue et al. (2018) recently, and their paper provides a good approach to translation and testing.

There are also issues of general validation of this measure before it could be used robustly for practice or further research. The BOWSVA needs to be tested on further large samples of UK participants to explore whether the factor structure remains stable and whether correlations to U-IRMAS remain the same. This work is ongoing.

Reflexive comment

The exploration of existing measures helped me to see issues with language and measurement I had never noticed before. This influenced the way I built the items for the BOWSVA and what I thought might happen depending on the use of language in each item. I also had to reflect on the interpretation and analysis of the data, as this process is not objective. Whilst counting numbers and calculating an average or correlation may seem to be objective, this process is value-laden and subjective throughout. Processes such as deciding whether to delete responses or outliers, decisions about how to interpret data and the process of exploring the component analysis results are all subjective, personal choices of a researcher that cannot be considered an objective process. Therefore, it was important to me to reflect on why I made these decisions or interpreted the data in the way I did. The final stages of interpreting components and pattern matrices is highly subjective, and it occurred to me that different psychometricians came to their conclusions in different, discretional

ways; using different methods, different cut-off points, different data analysis approaches and their own knowledge of the topic area. This chapter does not present a ready-made psychometric measure and did not seek to overstate what the chapter had achieved. Instead, this chapter presents the strong beginning of a longer process that needs much consideration.

Sequential learning: Implications of findings for the next study

As this thesis utilises an iterative sequential methodology for mixed methods study design and delivery, this section will discuss how the findings from this quantitative study influenced the aims of the next study. The study reported in Chapter 5 is a qualitative semi-structured interview study that seeks to explore the way women construct victim blaming and self-blame after sexual violence perpetrated against them.

The theme of language continues into this chapter, having been explored in psychometric test construction. In the previous chapter, victim blaming of women subjected to sexual violence was found to be common, but dependent upon the type of offence or the way the woman was described in the language of the items. Whilst the perceptions and victim blaming attitudes of the British public is vital to understanding the prevalence and nature of victim blaming of women, a rounded understanding of victim blaming requires the voice of the women themselves. Therefore, the next study builds on the previous study by talking directly to women who have been blamed for sexual violence to explore how they use language to construct victim blaming and self-blame of women subjected to sexual violence. Do women subjected to sexual violence understand victim blaming and how prevalent it

is? How do women talk about the reasons people blamed them and the reasons they blame themselves?

Chapter 5

Study 2: Women's constructions of victim blaming and self-blame after sexual violence: A critical discursive analysis

Abstract

Utilising a semi-structured interview framework and critical discursive analysis, this study explores the way women subjected to sexual violence use talk to construct their understanding and experiences of victim blaming and self-blame. Interviews with ten women aged 19-76 years old from a range of backgrounds presented eight key discourses that were used by women to talk about victim blaming of women, victim blaming of themselves and their own self-blame. Women constructed victim blaming and self-blame with multiple competing interpretative repertoires from society and support networks and their talk often engaged ideological dilemmas about being positioned as to blame for sexual violence, whilst 'feeling' that they were not to blame. Talk was complex, nuanced and multi-faceted, suggesting that women do not simply 'absorb' discourses about victim blaming and self-blame from society, but interrogate victim blaming and self-blame as they talk about it.

Introduction

In the UK, less than 13% of women subjected to sexual violence report to the police (CSEW, 2017; Donde et al., 2018) and many women worry about disclosing sexual violence due to concerns that they will be blamed or judged for being abused, assaulted or raped (Campbell et al., 2009; Donde et al., 2018; Ullman, 2010). Transferring the blame of an act of sexual violence from the perpetrator to the victim is known as 'victim-blaming'. Self-blame is the feeling of blaming the self for being subjected to sexual violence perpetrated by another person. Defined by Janoff-Bulman (1979), self-blame is the cognitive process of attribution of an event to the

character or behaviour of the self. Previous research has shown that when women experience negative or blaming responses from support networks or society, they are more likely to self-blame (Anderson, 1999; Sleath, 2011).

Victim blaming and self-blame of women has been shown to be influenced by and constructed with language and discourses about women, sexual violence and blame (Klein, 2013). Relativist approaches to language propose that language constructs reality, meaning that the words we use to express our ideas and discourses about ourselves and the world can give us clues to the power dynamics, constructions, positions and dilemmas in social issues (Klein, 2013; Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2014). Whilst this method is rare (Maier, 2013), one example of the way language has been examined in sexual and domestic violence includes the edited series by Klein (2013, p1) who argues that language should be explored and analysed because, ‘language use, for better or worse, shapes the process of perceiving, interpreting and responding to abuse.’

Previous research has suggested that victim blaming and self-blame can be explained by RMA, BJW, attribution bias or hostile sexism towards women, with many studies seeking to explore correlations and relationships between scores on psychometric measures of these factors (Anderson, 1999; Maier, 2013). However, studies which centre the talk of women as they construct their own thoughts about why women are blamed for sexual violence and why women might blame themselves for sexual violence are rare (Klein, 2013; Maier, 2013).

This study used open-ended, semi-structured interviews to explore the way women construct victim blaming and self-blame of women subjected to sexual violence in their talk. This was not specific to their own experiences of sexual violence or blame

but included their ideas on why victim blaming was so prevalent, what led people to blame women and what led women to blame themselves for sexual violence perpetrated against them by men. By utilising a critical discursive analysis, this study aims to present the discursive tools by women as they negotiate explanations of victim blaming and self-blame of themselves and other women. The research question was:

How do women use language to construct their understanding of victim blaming and self-blame of women who have been subjected to sexual violence?

Method

As the rationale for the general methodological approach has been discussed in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3), this section will provide the details of the specific method taken for this study.

Design

The design of this study was a qualitative semi-structured interview design utilising critical discursive analysis to interpret the data and a critical feminist perspective to inform the positioning and role of the participants and researcher. The research design and method were approved by the University of Birmingham ethics committee (Appendix 8).

Participants

The sample for this study was ten women aged 19-76 years old, living in the UK, who had been subjected to sexual violence and were accessing support services. The sample was self-selecting from three sexual violence services in England, and all women must have been subjected to sexual violence since the age of 13 years

old (Appendix 9). The women were from a range of ethnicities, including South Asian Pakistani, Black Caribbean, Polish and White British. They had a range of life experiences, such as being a stay at home parent and wife, being retired, being unable to work due to disability, currently studying at university and careers including a nurse, counsellor, professional ballet dancer and teacher. Women who participated also spoke about their religious beliefs, including Islam, Christianity, Catholicism and Atheism. All women were accessing sexual violence support services at the time of participation and had self-referred to the organisation to seek help. They were recruited using posters and information being shared by the services with all of their clients. Eight women met the researcher for a face-to-face interview and two women took part over the phone.

Materials

This qualitative research design only required minimal materials; information and consent forms (Appendix 10), semi-structured interview schedule of approved questions (Appendix 11) and a Dictaphone to record interviews. Organisations were provided with guidance about who could take part in the study to limit traumatisation of women (Appendix 12).

Procedure

Full information about the study was shared with three independent sexual violence support services and women's centres in the UK, and they were asked to make all clients aware that there was an opportunity to take part in confidential research about victim blaming and self-blame. Organisations were given some guidance to ensure women who wanted to take part were given the right guidance to reduce the risk of further trauma (Appendix 12). There was no deception or withheld information

in the call for participants to enable women to make an informed decision about their participation. Women who were interested in taking part expressed their interest to the service they were accessing or contacted the researcher directly. The researcher met with the women and conducted the interviews in the confidential counselling rooms at each service. Women were able to book times and dates that were suitable for them to take part or were able to take part over the phone if this would be easier for them.

In advance of meetings and telephone calls, all participants were sent copies of the information sheet and consent form to read and consider (Appendix 10). Women were invited to ask any further questions before the interview or on the day. All women read the information and signed consent forms before taking part in the interviews.

Interviews varied from around 45 minutes to 70 minutes and were based on the questions set out in the semi-structured interview question schedule (Appendix 11). After interviews ended, the researcher spent some time talking to participants to debrief from the session (Appendix 13) and to answer any questions they had about the study. At this point, participants were reminded that they would be invited to comment on the interpretation of the data and the findings from this research and that the researcher would be back in touch in the future.

Throughout the process of data collection and data analysis the researcher kept a reflexive diary and attended clinical supervision with a trained supervisor.

Analysis of interview data

Data from the interviews was transcribed manually and any identifying information was removed from the transcripts (e.g. people and place names, street names,

employers, locations and institutions). Transcribing the data is considered by some to be a reflexive and interactive process:

‘The responsible practice of transcription ...requires the transcriber’s cognizance of her or his own role in the creation of the text and the ideological implications of the resultant product’ (Bucholtz, 2000, p. 1440).

All names were replaced by a pseudonym and a spreadsheet of pseudonyms was created and encrypted.

Final anonymised transcripts were then stored securely and encrypted whilst analysis took place. The interview data was analysed using critical discursive analysis by the researcher, with analysis and interpretation being checked by a supervisor experienced in qualitative data analysis methods.

Transcripts were explored using Wetherell et al. (2014) approaches to discourse analysis, particularly drawing on analytical advice from Fairclough (2001) and Edley (2001). The first stage of analysis was reading and exploring the transcript and refamiliarizing the researcher with the data. The second stage of analysis focussed on the transcripts as talk, exploring the data for recurring interpretative repertoires (IR), subject positions (SP) and ideological dilemmas (ID) being constructed by the participants (see Table 24 for definitions). Parts of speech were highlighted and categorised as IR, ID or SP, respectively, although often the speech contained some or all of these. When speech contained multiple discursive tools, they were coded to show that they may overlap and were explored further in the next stages of analysis.

After the first level of coding, the transcripts were checked by a second coder experienced in qualitative analysis methods to confirm accuracy and consistency of interpretation of the discursive tools.

The third stage of analysis was to work back through the annotated transcripts and look for frequency, recurrence and repetition of interpretative repertoire use, ideological dilemmas and subject positions. The purpose of the third stage of analysis was to begin to label and describe the discursive tools being used by participants. Further description of stages of analysis with examples are included in Appendix 14.

Finally, themes and relevant samples were checked again by the second coder to check for accuracy and consistency of interpretation. Once the themes had been finalised, the findings and interpreted speech was sent back to all participants for their own thoughts on the interpretation of their talk. Participants were contacted with anonymised copies of the findings from the discourse analysis and a final draft of this chapter to seek their opinions and ideas via email. Participants were given one month to respond with their thoughts if they would like them to be included in the research. Responses from women who gave their feedback have been included in this chapter.

Data are presented and explored below through the lens of the three tools described by Edley (2001): the interpretative repertoire, the ideological dilemma and the subject position. All three discursive tools provide information about the way language constructs the issue of victim blaming and self-blame of women who have been subjected to sexual violence.

Table 24: Definitions of the discursive tools as the focus for analysis (adapted from Edley, 2001)

Discursive tool	Explanation
Interpretative repertoire	A collection of widely used metaphors, phrases, terms and ways of talking about a specific issue. The building blocks of conversation, they are a selection of commonly recited or replicated linguistic resources that are available, and utilised by people when they speak (Edley, 2001; Potter and Wetherell, 1987)
Ideological dilemma	A widely employed set of phrases, explanations or understandings about an issue, embedded in an ideology, set of values, beliefs or culture that become fragmented, inconsistent or contradictory when people talk about them. Often described as 'common-sense explanations' that contradict other dominant 'common-sense explanations' of the same issue (Edley, 2001; Billig et al. 1988)
Subject position	The way language and the speaker locate themselves and others in conversation and construct identities of people and organisations in relation to others in hierarchies of social position, power and control (Edley, 2001)

Learning from feedback

As part of the commitment to centring and empowering women's voices throughout this research, all women were contacted when the transcripts were being analysed to invite them to read through the initial findings and themes before they were written up. All ten women were contacted with copies of the findings and five of them replied

to give their thoughts about the study findings and my interpretation of their talk. All women agreed with the findings and said that taking part in the study, and reading the findings had been a valuable experience. One woman said that she was happy that someone was presenting research about women's experiences of victim blaming and self-blame as she felt it was under researched and not talked about enough. All five women said that they felt their thoughts were accurately represented and the themes they were categorised under were suitable.

Results

This section will present the results from the critical discourse analysis to answer the research question: *How do women use language to construct their understanding of victim blaming and self-blame of women who have been subjected to sexual violence?*

Table 25: Key discursive tools used by women to talk about victim blaming and self-blame

Discursive tool	**Number of Participants**	**Occurrences in speech**
Rape myths	10	23
Women must have done something wrong to deserve sexual violence	5	8
Women should change something about themselves to protect themselves from sexual violence	6	21
Knowing the sexual violence is wrong but not being able to stop it	4	20
Questioning whether she is truly to blame or whether she is overthinking	3	15
Knowing logically that she is not to blame but still feeling to blame	8	17
Women positioned as responsible for men's behaviours	6	19

Women positioned as victims of a misogynistic society	5	10

Findings are presented as interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positioning in the language of the participants. However, important consideration must be given to the fact that ideological dilemmas and subject positioning of self and others are often influenced by and interlinked with interpretative repertoires and so presenting them as separate artefacts in language is not always helpful.

Rape myths

The most common interpretative repertoire utilised by the participants was rape myths. As a set of commonly held beliefs available to society, when women were asked why women were blamed or why women might blame themselves for being subjected to sexual violence, one of the most common constructs used to explain victim blaming was with a rape myth. Rape myths were used by participants to explain why observers and others blamed women but were also used to explain why women blamed themselves.

Extract 1

> RESEARCHER: *Why do you think some people blame women who have been subjected to different forms of sexual violence?*
>
> AMY: *That they are dirty. Um, but yeah, I think that's the ultimate thing they think, is like, oh, they must be dirty, or they flaunt themselves, or— I don't know. From my experience, yeah, I think that's, that's what I think people think. But, um, they, like, say, oh, it's how they've dressed, or it's cos they*

wear too much makeup, cos they're overconfident and they're quite flirtatious. Um, yeah, I'd say that's what people think (laughs).*'*

RESEARCHER: *Yeah, I see.*

AMY: *Um, so yeah, I think, er, we blame ourselves for strength, like lack of strength. From my experience, strength, um, body size maybe, how I look, maybe too confident, I think that might've attracted the wrong people and — I don't know. Like they're the only ones that can think of.*

Extract 1 was fairly typical of the responses from all participants, who described numerous rape myths in their answers. Women were able to recount almost every commonly held rape myth belief and positioned the interpretative repertoire of the rape myth as being used by 'them' and they' (meaning external people, society, family and friends) but also used them to describe their own experiences of rape and sexual assault.

Extract 2

JANE: *It's more of a, erm, you know, "You could have led them on," or "You got drunk," or, "It's not their fault, how were they to know?" Or, "They couldn't control themselves because of what you were wearing."*

Extract 3

DANIELLE: *Um because we are all classed as the same and we are all slappers and all classed as going out in little dresses and because the way you look, you attract that and that's why a man does it*

All participants discussed the rape myth that blames women for being raped or sexually assaulted due to wearing revealing clothing. This rape myth, along with the

many others discussed, were used to construct participants understanding of why people blame women, but also why women blamed themselves, as seen in Extract 1. Participants also appeared so aware of the rape myths and stereotypes used by society and authorities that they were comparing their own rape experiences against the known rape myths to assess whether they would be taken seriously or not, something that has been repeatedly found in previous research (Campbell and Raja, 2005).

In Extract 4, Sasha frames her rape as a 'best case scenario' and 'as good as you are going to get' because she understood that her rape fitted the 'real rape' stereotype or 'classic rape' as suggested by Williams (1984) and that people would be more likely to perceive what happened to her to be a rape.

Extract 4

> SASHA: *…um, so I've experienced a number of different, um, rapes, I guess, um, and one was your kind of, I guess best case scenario in some ways, in that there were witnesses, a stranger jumped out of nowhere, um, he was an illegal immigrant. So you know, on the face of it, that's as good as you're going to get as a victim, um, to any kind of experience in terms of how people are going to perceive that.*

As an interpretative repertoire, rape myths were influential in the participants' understanding of themselves and others, in which they knew they would be measured against and blamed using the rape myths which position them as lying or deserving of sexual violence (Payne et al., 1999). For some participants, they had accepted rape myths and applied them to themselves, whereas other women only

talked about them as being held in wider society and being applied to women from a distance.

Women must have done something wrong to deserve sexual violence

An increasingly dilemmatic interpretative repertoire employed by participants was the commonly held belief in society that women must have done something wrong to deserve sexual violence, which is linked in part, to one of the commonly held rape myths that women deserve it or did something which led the perpetrator to commit sexual violence offences. In addition, this theme may be related to BJW (Lerner, 1980). The way this interpretative repertoire was applied to construct victim blaming and self-blame varied. Some women used it to talk about the way they felt about themselves and some women used it to talk about beliefs held by others in society that would be applied to women who had been subjected to sexual violence. In extract 5, Phoebe talks about the response from others and the way 'they' would look for something the woman did wrong which led to being raped.

Extract 5

> PHOEBE: *They're just like, well you know, she – she must have wanted it. She must have done something to deserve it. She must have sought it out, um, you know, just that, that whole stereotypical response that you tend to get.*

Here, Phoebe's talk is a list of words that represent discourses about women subjected to sexual violence: that they want it, deserve it or sought it out; but this is also accompanied by an acknowledgement that they are stereotypes. However, when other participants utilised this interpretative repertoire, they talked about applying it to themselves before realising they did not wholly believe they did

something wrong to deserve being raped or abused. As demonstrated in extracts 6, 7 and 8, all women who discussed this commonly held belief who had initially applied it to themselves (sometimes for decades); eventually questioned whether they really had done anything wrong.

Extract 6

> SAMMI: *I questioned everything. You know, "Is it because I look older? Is it because I'm different to my sisters? Is it because I was um a quieter one than my two sisters? Is it because I wasn't close to my Mum, my Dad wasn't around, and I desperately wanted a Father figure in my life?" I looked at everything. So I think for me that's when the penny dropped, because up until then I did used to think I must've done something wrong.*

Extract 7

> JANE: *I was blamed that, you know, it was my fault, I was hanging around him too much, I was leading him on too much. And it's like, well not really! I used to play cards with you because you had no-one else that would hang out with you. It was like, well apparently, I was 'leading him on' and I was 'naïve because I was very young' and I 'didn't realise what I was doing.'*

Extract 8

> MAY: *That sort of thing doesn't happen to people and if it does happen to you, you must have been asking for it. And I don't think at seven when it first happened, I was asking for it!*

This interpretative repertoire was of interest because whilst it was utilised by almost every woman as they explained victim blaming, they also accepted that it was not

true – either for themselves or for others. Most of the women talked in past tense whilst applying it to themselves, but their explanations of this interpretative repertoire were entwined with present tense rebuttals of this commonly held narrative about sexual violence; suggesting a change in the way they constructed their blame over time.

An example of this is Extract 7 in which Jane gets part way through the explanation of why she was blamed for being raped before exclaiming 'Well not really!' before returning to the reasons why she was to blame and adding in the word 'apparently' and beginning to talk in quotes. In Extract 8, May talked in a similar way in which she began the sentence by describing herself as 'asking for it' right before stating 'I don't think at seven (…) I was asking for it!'.

As the interpretative repertoire was used in speech, women started to employ contradictory discourse about women doing something wrong to deserve sexual violence – and began to reject this interpretative repertoire, therefore contributing to an ideological dilemma about victim blaming. This resulted in a simultaneous construction of blame as being about women who do something wrong to deserve sexual violence whilst also rejecting this explanation, especially when it was applied to themselves.

Women also talked about doing 'everything right' and 'still' being raped or abused.

Extract 10

> JANE: *If I'm not, if I'm, if I have not done a thing wrong, why do people keep coming for me? Why can't they just move on to someone else? I know it's horrible to say*
>
> RESEARCHER: *Yeah I, I get it, yeah.*

JANE:…*but you do, but it is just something that goes through your mind at first and it's like, you know, "Why do they keep coming back for me then if I've done nothing wrong? So what these guys have been saying must be true. They must be right and I must blame myself, because I have done something wrong. But then I don't know if I'm one of them people because I can't see myself doing anything to lead anyone on...*

Sasha discussed the contradictory discourse that even if a woman did everything right or avoided danger or risk, there would still be a chance that they will be raped or assaulted. This contradicts the interpretative repertoire that women should change something about their character, behaviour or appearance in order to protect themselves.

Extract 11

SASHA: *cos you feel like there's an element of well, you know, you should look after yourself, but then you suddenly realise that actually if it wasn't you, it would be somebody else and all you're doing is protecting that, that one person, effectively, and essentially you're not even really protecting them because it could have happened no matter what they were wearing or what they were doing*

This theme presented evidence of a commonly used interpretative repertoire that women must have done something wrong to deserve sexual violence, but also the emerging evidence of an ideological dilemma in which some women began to question whether they had done something wrong to deserve the rape or assault. This theme could relate to the interplay between rape myths and BJW, in which women are employing interpretative repertoires from societal rape myths and the

belief that you get what you deserve in life, before interrogating these interpretative repertoires and concluding that these initially held beliefs cannot be right.

Women should change something about themselves to protect themselves from sexual violence

One of the most frequently utilised interpretative repertoires to construct their understanding of victim blaming and self-blame after sexual violence was the commonly held belief in society that women should change something about themselves (e.g., their behaviour, character, appearance, beliefs) to protect themselves from sexual violence. Originally theorised by Janoff-Bulman (1979), it is commonly believed that self-blame and making behavioural changes may be an adaptive coping mechanism which increases feelings of control for the woman (Frazier, 1990; Frazier, 2005). However, as the data were analysed, it became clearer that women were challenging the discourse that they should change something about themselves.

Participants tended to employ this interpretative repertoire when talking about themselves and their own self-blame, rather than talking about external people utilising this interpretative repertoire in their reasons as to why others blamed them. Participants talked about the need to change something about themselves in order to protect themselves from sexual violence.

In Extract 13, changing the self is framed by Sasha as a ‘self-protective element’ and a ‘normal human defence mechanism’ in which women try to work out what they did that led to being raped, and then try to change it so it doesn’t happen again, which is similar to the theories surrounding counterfactual thinking, perceived control and even Janoff-Bulman’s work (1979).

Extract 13

> SASHA: *I think there is a really strong self-protective element to blaming yourself and it kind of rationalises things, it means if you don't do it again, it won't happen again. And so I don't think it's – really, I don't think it's wholly external. I think it's a – I think it's a normal human defence mechanism, like trying to work out what it was that led up to disaster, then not doing that again. It's almost like a superstitious thing.*

Jane and Amy talked in past tense whilst describing normal, everyday behaviours they used to enjoy or feel comfortable with that they had changed since being blamed for sexual violence. They constructed their behaviours as problematic and talked about closing themselves away or becoming more conscious. Arguably, these constructions of changing the self as protection from sexual violence were more in line with contemporary findings that self-blame is maladaptive and impacts on social interactions and wellbeing of women (Miller et al., 2010).

Extract 14

> JANE: *I can be quite friendly and huggy. I've closed myself away a bit more now, but I used to go up and hug all my best friends.*

Extract 15

> AMY: *It was just cos I enjoyed dancing and feel good about myself when I dance. And I still do now, to this day. I'm a bit more conscious of when I dance and teach, cos I'm a dance teacher. But now it— I couldn't have helped my body shape. It was just how I grew. So, yeah.*

However, Danielle talked about a professional who directly told her she was to blame for being raped by a stranger who had drugged her after a ballet show. The words of the psychologist from whom she sought help for trauma, caused her to change many things about her life as she believed the psychologist was right – that she should change her appearance, career and behaviour in order to protect herself from sexual violence.

Extract 16

DANIELLE: *Yes so basically um I went to see a psychologist when I came back to England and he said, 'Look at yourself – you're a professional dancer, you are tall, beautiful and blonde – what did you expect?' And that's exactly what he said to me so I walked out of that room and I changed my whole life. I mean I have only just started going back to my natural hair colour but I dyed my hair black!*

RESEARCHER: *Did you?*

DANIELLE: *Yeah, I changed everything and I thought if I could block that bit of my life away then it didn't happen and I wanted to cover it all up so I could pretend it didn't happen*

RESEARCHER: *So that psychologist had a massive impact on you?*

DANIELLE: *Massive.*

RESEARCHER: *Do you think you were consciously thinking 'right, he must be right, I am going to change' or…*

DANIELLE: *Yeah, I agreed with it – I thought I agreed with it and I changed everything about myself. And I guess that's where some of the changing of yourself like your hair and your life – it was about protecting myself. Yeah. I didn't get as much attention from guys at all when I had black hair. I stopped dancing too. I opened a dance school for a few years and then I stopped.*

In Danielle's experience, the psychologist was the first person to construct a narrative in which Danielle was to blame. Before the appointment, she had never considered herself to blame (she was unconscious as she had been deliberately drugged by the perpetrator). However, once the psychologist had applied this interpretative repertoire to her experience, Danielle agreed, repositioned herself as to blame for being raped and in need of characterological and behavioural change.

This interpretative repertoire was featured in the answers of every participant. All women who took part in the study talked about making changes to themselves in order to protect themselves from future sexual violence, thereby positioning themselves as at fault for the rape or assaults they endured. Whilst discussing this interpretative repertoire, there was rarely mention of perpetrators or any other reasons for the sexual violence, other than their own behaviours, characters or appearances. Only one participant pointed out that irony of women being told to change something about themselves rather than perpetrators of crime being held responsible.

In Extract 17, Sasha compares the responses to terrorism to the responses to the rape of women and points out that women who are victims of sexual violence are asked to change themselves to protect themselves from crimes, whereas in terrorism crimes, the response is that no one should have to change themselves, to live a life free from crime and harm.

Extract 17

> SASHA: *When it comes to rape, then it's like it's almost the complete opposite reaction, um, that we should change our behaviours, that we should change how we act so that we don't experience sexual violence, but the response to terrorism is usually one of, um, and that we should carry on as we were (laughs) and that, you know, people shouldn't stop us from being free!*

However, this interpretative repertoire appears to contribute to a significant ideological dilemma when women talked about the changes they made to their lives, bodies and characters feeling punitive or affecting their freedom. As Sasha said, other victims of crime are not expected to change their lives in the way the women were describing and whilst all participants accepted that they did change something about themselves to try to protect themselves from sexual violence, they often questioned whether it was fair or whether it was affecting their lives. Jane spoke of the blame stopping her from going outside, being sociable and leaving her bedroom, before suggesting that the self-blame also stopped her from seeking support.

Extract 18

> JANE: *Erm, well it definitely has stopped me going outside and being sociable. I literally lock myself in, not just in my house, in my bedroom. It had to be my bedroom because that's where I felt safe. But if I didn't blame myself and I wasn't blamed so much by them who did all of that, I don't think I actually would have just gone and hid myself in my bed. I think I would have - sorry I'm starting to choke up a bit - sorry. I think I would have come and got a counsellor a lot sooner. A lot sooner.*

Amy and Demi discussed the psychological changes after they were raped as being a constant state of hypervigilance when they meet new men. They both talked about two competing narratives: the need to be cautious and to keep themselves safe versus having a normal, safe interaction with men they didn't know. Both highlighted positive interactions with men, but also an immediate sense of protection from danger.

Extract 19

> AMY: *So, I dropped him off and it was fine, anyway. But that could've been something really serious and I thought, oh my god. And I was kicking myself after, for a few days after. I really upset myself, thinking, how did I let my – let this person come? Why did I be that friendly again? That, that was like a big no-no. I should've not even got that far for him to come to my house and know where I live. So I thought, when I was talking and having a nice, it was even a laugh – and I don't remember the last time I laughed – I thought, oh, it's nice to have a nice chat with a man and just have a nice conversation. So I think I was maybe a bit too comfortable.*

Extract 20

DEMI: *When people, when like a guy gives you a compliment or anyone just gives you a compliment, you can think, 'Ah, they've just complimented me. I feel good in what I wear now.'*

RESERCHER: *Yeah.*

DEMI: *And they, I, forget to think what that compliment could mean… and if they follow you home.*

This theme presented a set of competing beliefs, impacts and feelings about self-blame and changing the self after sexual violence or in order to protect the self from sexual violence. Initially positioning themselves as to blame and in need of change to protect themselves, women also argued against and challenged the discourse that recommended they should change themselves or monitor their own behaviour. Contrary to theories that behavioural self-blame and changing the self could be an adaptive coping mechanism (Janoff-Bulman, 1979), women constructed this narrative as stressful, confusing, unhelpful and causing them a great deal of worry about whether their behaviours would lead to more sexual violence.

Knowing the sexual violence is wrong but not being able to stop it

This ideological dilemma was discussed by almost all participants. It was presented in the discussions as a contradictory narrative of knowing that what was happening to them was wrong, abusive or violent but not feeling able to stop it from happening. Therefore, when discussing self-blame and victim blaming, women talked about the blame coming from knowing they were being abused or raped, but not doing enough to stop it. This contradicts the commonly held interpretative repertoire that women who are raped or abused did not know what was happening to them, and they

therefore require information or education to protect themselves (Jago and Christenfield, 2018). Conversely, all of the women interviewed said they knew that what was happening to them was wrong but positioned themselves as powerless or not 'confident' enough to stop the offender.

May positioned men as 'in the right' and repeatedly positioned herself as having 'no worth' for 'allowing' the sexual abuse perpetrated by her step-father, which she does report saying no to, despite manipulation.

Extract 21

> MAY: *Yeah yeah. My stepfather wanted to sleep with me, he promised he would point the house outside, if I would – so I did manage to say no to him, but it makes you feel as if men are in the right and you should do what they say and if you don't, um, you've got no worth, you feel as though you got no worth cos you let it happen and its so stupid but its your fault that you have no worth cos now you allowed it to happen.*

Demi also discussed being made to feel powerless due to manipulation and then being forced to perform sex acts she didn't want to do. Even after the rapes, Demi positioned herself as having no choice and losing confidence. Confidence became a recurring theme in which women talked about knowing they were being raped or abused but not having the confidence to stop it – or in Jane's case, disclose to others.

Extract 22

> DEMI: *And then, sort of, so – and then because of that I kind of lost confidence and I didn't feel like I was wanted, so I didn't really want to have sex. I suppose, er, I didn't. And then I didn't really have a choice after a*

while, because I think it was like, "Oh I don't want this. I have to do this to keep him, to keep him here." And then it got to a stage where he was saying, "I will leave you if you don't do this." And so I had to, you know, I, I, I like never have wanted to have anal sex in my life, it wasn't something that I want, I have ever wanted. But then I think you know where I was at the time, I don't think that would have – I wouldn't have left, I wouldn't have left.

Jane positioned herself as a 'freak' with no confidence, who blamed herself and that no one would believe her disclosure, despite her knowing she was raped. She said that her lowered self-esteem made the self-blame worse which led to her positioning herself as a freak.

Extract 23

JANE: *And obviously being picked on lowered my confidence and my self-esteem went really low, like quite low after that compared to what it was before. I just made it worse so I was less likely to speak out anyway because now I had no confidence. That made me think even worse that it was my fault, because it's like, "Oh maybe I am to blame because I'm a freak," so, "No-one likes freaks, no-one's gonna believe freaks."*

And even when some women spoke out about being raped as teenagers, their knowledge of the rape and their confidence to disclose was met with further manipulation and threats. Amy reported knowing that her friend's stepdad had raped her, but his wife told her they would kill her or her friend would be taken into local authority care if she ever told anyone, which stopped her from disclosing.

Extract 24

> AMY: *He was my friend from school's stepdad, and I told the mum. But the mum said, if I tell anybody, that, um, they would either kill me, or my friend will get put into care. And obviously now I'm like, that will never have happened. But as I say, I couldn't do anything.*

It became clear in the narratives of all the women, that they had said no and that they had known they were being abused or raped at the time of the offence, but constructed themselves as unable to say no, or unable to stop the perpetrator. In Phoebe's experience, she repeatedly said no and pushed the perpetrator away as she woke up and was ignored. Phoebe echoed the words of Amy and said she couldn't do anything to stop him, despite knowing she was being sexually assaulted in her hotel room.

Extract 25

> PHOEBE: *But I remember then, actually in the room, we were just chatting on the bed, and, you know, he, he was touching me with his hands, and I was pushing his hand away, going no, no, no, I've just woken up, I don't want that. But he kept doing it, so in the end I just stopped fighting it. Um, so, you know, he was just touching me with his hands, you know, fingering me and stuff like that. Um, and I remember thinking then, I felt quite uncomfortable about it but felt like I couldn't – I couldn't do anything.*

Further to a feeling of not being able to do anything about a rape or assault, Sasha positioned herself as being stuck in a 'contract' with the perpetrator and there was no way of getting out of the situation. Despite knowing the situation had become dangerous and she did not want the sexual intercourse, Sasha presented a

contradictory narrative of simultaneously knowing she didn't want sex but also felt the perpetrator was entitled to it because she had 'led someone on'.

Extract 26

> SASHA: *what's acceptable to you, um, and also um, kind of in the moment labelling something as inappropriate because you're so used to kind of assuming that you've done something to get you to that stage, you think – you know, you kind of feel like you've signed a contract almost or like there's not getting out of this or, um, you've led someone on this long, so this is going to happen and you don't feel so able to say actually, you know, this shouldn't go any further. I need to leave.*

Together, this theme presented a contradictory interpretative repertoire about whether women know what sexual violence is as it is happening, and whether knowing they were being raped or assaulted would help them to stop the perpetrator. Women positioned themselves as powerless, not able to do anything to stop the perpetrator and lacking in confidence. This was particularly of interest considering that all women described saying 'no' repeatedly to the perpetrator before being manipulated or overpowered. This challenges previous research that found that when women did not fight back or assert themselves, they were less likely to acknowledge that they were raped or sexually assaulted (Donde et al., 2018). Here, it seems that women knew they were being sexually assaulted or raped, acknowledge it as such but were unable to prevent the perpetrator assaulting them.

Questioning whether she is truly to blame or whether she is overthinking it

When women discussed victim blaming and self-blame, there was a distinct ideological dilemma that presented repeatedly – and was talked about by almost all

participants. They talked about a feeling of over-analysing themselves or overthinking the victim blaming and self-blame, to a point where they become obsessed with it. Those women who were blamed for sexual violence perpetrated against them used a competing narrative in which they applied the interpretative repertoires of rape myths and of changing themselves to protect themselves from sexual violence. However, whilst they applied the interpretative repertoires, the women also talked of overthinking the rape or abuse which had led to over-analysis of self and an impact on their lifestyles and wellbeing. This theme again presents evidence that self-blame is not an adaptive or positive coping mechanism as presented by Janoff-Bulman (1979) and supports more contemporary research that self-blame and counterfactual thinking in such cases is unhelpful and potentially harmful (Frazier, 1990; 2005).

Danielle and Amy both used the word ‘over-analyse’ whilst talking in questions about themselves and the blame.

Extract 27

> DANIELLE: *That would never happen to me again? I don’t know? Maybe I over analyse it all? I do self-blame because I think it’s looking back on things that happened and you think ‘if I hadn’t have done that then this wouldn’t have happened’ and it think it’s this over-analysing that I do*

Extract 28

> AMY: *And I still do now, to this day. I'm a bit more conscious of when I dance and teach, cos I'm a dance teacher. I always think, oh, is it cos of my body shape or size? You know, big boobs? (laughs). I don't know. I, I always— And even constantly to this day, I still overanalyse myself.*

RESEARCHER: *Yeah.*

AMY: *I don't think I'll ever not do that now.*

Jane talked of the questions she asked of herself based on rape myths and the interpretative repertoire that she should change something about herself to protect herself form sexual violence. She described it as ‘over thinking’, as did Amy and Demi. Amy described the overthinking as affecting her mental health, as she is constantly having to think and over-think the motives, actions and behaviours of herself and others, in order to stay safe from sexual violence.

Extract 29

JANE: *And everywhere I went I was like, “Hi,” because if I knew someone I was like (gasps), “Oh no, what if I just smiled?” Or, “What if my skirt’s a little bit too short?” “What if I need to wear a higher top,” you know. “Should I wear my hair up or should I just wear it down straight, so it doesn’t look too bouncy or flirty.” I got to the point where I thought my nails, my shoes and my hair between them looked flirty, let alone my…my outfit. I was always over thinking.*

Extract 30

AMY: *Yeah. Sometimes it annoys me cos I feel like I'm always questioning people's motives or why they wanna be nice or… why are they aggressive, anything. Anything we say or do, I have to— I think, mentally, it drives you insane (laughs). Mentally, I think it gives you— Well, I'm sure I've got mental health (laughs)— Like it makes your head just go crazy, like you're over-thinking everything.*

This ideological dilemma revealed an active interaction with victim blaming and self-blame in which women did not passively accept self-blame, but did use it to question the decisions, actions, characters and motivations of themselves and others. The dilemmatic exchange between applying interpretative repertoires and rape myths to themselves but also constructing the constant questioning of themselves was reported to be exhausting and all encompassing, which appears to have negative consequences for their mental health and day to day lives.

Knowing logically that she is not to blame, but still feeling to blame

Within the conversations with all women, there were constructions of self-blame as being accepted but also not accepted at the same time. Women talked about knowing 'logically' and 'consciously' that they were not to blame or called their self-blame 'not logical' but described the self-blame as something deeper than logic or conscious thinking. It appears that women were struggling against the interpretative repertoires about blame which was resulting in a contradictory narrative in which women positioned themselves as not to blame but still 'feeling' to blame. The discussions became an uncomfortable construction of self-blame as being something that was deep within them, but not accepted as fact.

Extract 31

> SASHA: *Um, I think – yeah, I think honestly yeah. I think if you asked me like consciously do you blame yourself, then I always say no but, um, I think it's a bit – it's kind of a bit more subtle, it's a bit deeper than that. Um, I think it does kind of – I don't really know how to describe it.*

Extract 32

> RESEARCHER: *So, do you blame yourself less now?*

MAY: *Not. No. When you have lived with something like that for so many years its really difficult to change your way of thinking and you think you have but you haven't and it's still there because logically it doesn't make sense that you think that way, but you do. Yep.*

However, Amy described the feeling as being inverted. A feeling that on the surface, she thinks it was her fault for being raped – but that 'deep down' she knew it was not her fault. This theme presents a contradictory, almost dichotomous, relationship with self-blame after sexual violence.

Extract 33

AMY: *Now, I don't know. I still, it's still in my mind but I'm still not a hundred per cent convinced that it wasn't all of my fault (laughs). As much as I say it, that I think it's my fault, I know deep, deep, deep down that it's not my fault.*

RESEARCHER: *Hmm.*

AMY: *But unless something in my head just says, "Well, if you did this differently, then it may not have happened", or what-ifs. But you can be what-iffing it forever (laughs).*

Some participants talked about their experience of being directly blamed by family members and initially accepting the blame or reasoning behind why they were raped or abused, before questioning their narrative. Sammi and Phoebe spoke of a realisation that occurred that they were not to blame for being raped, but both also talked back and forth between questioning the blamer and questioning themselves.

The movement in the speech between questioning themselves and the person who blamed them was notable, in which women positioned themselves as victims of blaming from family and then repositioned themselves as assertive. However, both participants were assertive in their heads, but did not challenge the blamer out loud.

Extract 34

PHOEBE: *and what my mum said, it sort of stayed with me for years. What my mum said to me is, she said, 'Oh she hasn't – she hasn't been raped, she's just had a nasty experience!' Um, and that, you know, I found that quite confusing because then I thought well actually then, have I? But I know – I know that I was crying. I know that he like, he hurt the top of my legs. I said no I didn't want to, um, and, you know, I think, you know, did my mum genuinely think that? So, what it did for me, was it reinforced in me really, that because of possibly my mum's perception of me being a bit of a slag, um, it kind of like, 'Well, you know, what do you expect?' type thing. And so kind of reinforced really that I had… it was something that basically, chalked down to experience, not complaining about and just, you know, get on with it.*

Extract 35

SAMMI: *Uncle suggesting that I was a very flirtatious child and could that possibly be a reason for why things had happened? And at the time I wasn't kind of aware, you know, I was 13, I wasn't kind of aware. But looking back on it now, I think that that is absolutely abhorrent to think that a child from five to thirteen years old can flirt with an adult and that is the reason why she deserves to be sexually abused. That's just, you know, shocking*

Discussions with women also included a further contradiction in the self-blame narrative in which women talked about blaming themselves, but not other women who had been subjected to the same violence.

Extract 36

> MAY: *And in the same way, you still feel the same and you feel guilty but would you blame a woman who went through the same thing as you? No!*
>
> RESEARCHER: *No?*
>
> MAY: *Because they are not me! (laughs) I know it sounds stupid.*

This theme (like the one before) presented self-blame after victim blaming to be diverse and dynamic – with women as active agents wrestling with the blame and using reason and logic to try to understand it rather than passive vessels which accept victim blaming to be true and then apply it to themselves. This theme also seems to present self-blame after victim blaming to be existing at two levels – a conscious, logical level and a deeper, emotional level that women described as difficult to explain or 'stupid'. This is a particularly important finding as many of the therapeutic interventions to challenge self-blame focus on cognitive restructuring, CBT or approaches that encourage the person to think differently about the sexual violence by breaking down rape myths or faulty beliefs (Jaycox, Zoellner & Foa, 2002, p.893). However, this is unlikely to be effective if women already agree that they 'know' they are not to blame but still 'feel' to blame.

Women positioned as responsible for men's behaviours

This subject position was the most frequently used by the women when discussing why women were blamed or why women blame themselves for sexual violence.

Participants positioned women as responsible for men's behaviours or talked about the way society had put them in that position as woman – in which others had held her responsible for the behaviours and responses of men. However, when talking about 'men', they were not just talking about perpetrators or men they deemed to be a risk to them – they also talked about being responsible for the reactions of their male family members when they learned that they had been raped.

Extract 37

> DEMI: *When I've spoken to, um, someone, my mental health nurse about it she, she said, "Well are you going to go to the Police?" And I said, "Well, um, no." And then there was this sort of, "Well what if he does it so someone else?"*
>
> RESEARCHER: *Oh no.*
>
> DEMI: *Yeah.* (Laughs) *I thought— "Yeah, as if his behaviour is my responsibility!"*

Phoebe discussed national public awareness campaigns that also place responsibility on women, positioning them as the receiver of the messages about sexual violence, rather than perpetrators.

Extract 38

> PHOEBE: *And I think even when there is big things from the police at certain times of the year, you know, like Christmas, around; all women make sure you've got enough money to get home, make sure you know, know who you're getting in a taxi – with – so I think it tends to place the responsibility on women for controlling… controlling men's behaviour in the main*

This discourse of women being repeatedly positioned as responsible for the behaviour of men who have raped and abused them was brought up by May, who asked rhetorical questions about why no one was asking questions directly to perpetrators of abuse and violence.

Extract 39

> MAY: *But I've never understood why, we place you know, so much emphasis on women who are predominantly, you know, the, the victims in this, as opposed to actually asking the questions of, well why do those men rape in the first place? Why do they continue to beat their partner? My worry would be that, you know, is there something that makes it feel like again, that women can control that, you know, and they, they can't, it's absolutely… it's never their fault. It actually never rests with it being our fault.*

Sasha talked generally about feeling responsible for rape even when no one had told her so. She positioned herself and her own safety as second to the perpetrator's wants and need – to the point where Sasha apologised to one of the men who raped her because he complained that she didn't enjoy it.

Extract 40

> SASHA: *I feel – I feel like it's getting better, but there's still this element of, um, I guess even when it's not kind of overtly blaming somebody, that there's an element of that you should take responsibility for what happened. So you become more vulnerable because you're so used to kind of taking responsibility for that other person's actions, that you – it's almost like you think about them before you think about yourself and your safety*
>
> RESEARCHER: *Yeah I see what you're saying*

SASHA: *Um, and so I guess that is that kind of – that's when you take responsibility for something that is way beyond your control and, and after what, what was actually a rape, I texted him to say I was really sorry that I didn't enjoy it and that, um, it wasn't his fault that I just wasn't into it. I was like, 'Like, why did you apologise?' Um, and I guess that's taking that responsibility to its extreme, is to say sorry for, um, getting raped*

The positioning of women as responsible for men's behaviours extended past the perpetrator and towards husbands, boyfriends and fathers. Demi and two other women positioned themselves as not only responsible for the rapes, but responsible for the impact their disclosure would have on male family members. They did not discuss the same concern about impact on or responsibility for their mothers, or female friends or sisters. Demi told her mum and friends, but never told her Dad as she felt responsible for his reaction.

Extract 41

DEMI: *I feel also that, I don't, I, I'm worried that it will cause other people pain. You know, I can't imagine telling my Dad that something like that's happened to me. I just feel like I don't – he – it would hurt him and I don't want to hurt him and I don't want him to have to think about it. Um, so I'd rather just keep all the pain to myself.*

This theme was based on subject positioning in the talk about victim blaming and self-blame of women. It demonstrated that even when women were not directly blamed by someone, they already felt a sense of responsibility from their upbringing and from society that positioned them as responsible for the actions of men – and even the emotions and responses of men. This theme is linguistically of interest, as it

was the only theme that utilised the term ‘responsibility’ instead of blame. Women applied the word ‘responsibility’ to construct and sometimes reject, a positioning of them as in control of the actions, reactions, behaviours and motivations of men. This finding is particularly significant considering the debate in the literature about the conflation of words ‘blame’ and ‘responsibility’ (Critchlow et al., 1985; Shaver and Drown, 1986).

Women are positioned as victim of a misogynistic society

The final theme was a subject position in which women were positioned as secondary victims of a misogynistic society that did not treat them fairly. Women discussed victim blaming as a symptom of a society that discriminates against and attempts to control women through culture, media, gender roles and societal norms. All participants talked about this subject position.

Phoebe positioned women as treated badly due to social messages and attitudes towards women, and Sasha positioned women as being treated unfairly in contrast to men, who are not expected to curb their sexuality or behaviours.

Extract 42

> PHOEBE: *I think, because we do live in quite a patriarchal society. I think you’ve got a lot of misogyny that comes around, um, magazines, social media, so I think you know, the attitudes to women, um, are not in the main very healthy. It’s not just about the sexual assault stuff I guess, it’s around the traditional roles that women have and you know, what are those messages that people pick up there. Um, you know, and how they treat women in general.*

Extract 43

> SASHA: - *I think what feeds into that is this idea of, um, I guess how autonomous women should be and how they should be well-behaved. I think that really fits – kind of feeds into that and so it makes it easier because we don't, we don't expect men to do the same thing, even though they do get – there is sexual violence against men. Um, there isn't that same pressure that they should somehow, you know, curb their sexuality or their behaviour or how they dress, um, and I think that's to do with just how easy women, er, and their role in society.*

Demi and Amy both related victim blaming to a punishment for women and girls being sexually active in a society which objectifies and abuses women, but does not see them as independent sexual beings. This is an interesting finding when considered with the findings from the BOWSVA study which found one of the seven components of victim blaming to be 'the sexually active woman', who deserves much more blame for sexual violence perpetrated against her, simply for being sexually liberal or enjoying sex.

Extract 44

> DEMI: *Yeah. But I'm also, well, I'm also convinced that we still have a massive problem with women being sexual beings. And so there's this you know, if a woman has gone out and had a one night stand and is assaulted on her one night stand, then it's her fault because she shouldn't be having a one night stand. Not that a man shouldn't be behaving in that way. Um, and so I think that there's a lot tied up around women's sexuality.*

Extract 45

AMY: *But then I think I was partly to blame because — Not blame, but, okay, maybe, because, um, he heard that I had a boyfriend…and because I had had sex and I was young. I wasn't sixteen. Is that, is that the law, sixteen or eighteen?*

RESEARCHER: *Hm-hm, yeah, sixteen.*

AMY: *And I was nearly sixteen (laughs), so I was like, oh, this is probably punishment because I wasn't sixteen yet. That's what I thought in my head.*

Jane and Sasha positioned victim blaming as a way in which women were unfairly blamed for behaviours, characteristics and appearances that would be acceptable for a man in the same community.

Extract 46

JANE: *Men can go around with their tops off, half naked, topless in small shorts – it doesn't matter, they wear what they like. Women walk around in shorts and a little tank top, and they were asking for it if they get caught up a back street.*

Extract 47

SASHA: *it becomes even more clear that, that women are being constrained and being told to live life less than, than men because of the kind of threat that's around um, but I think because of how we're immersed in this society that blames women and sees women more in a certain way that it makes it so much easier, um, to then blame yourself even for the most obvious examples*

This theme is an important inclusion as all women who took part in the study positioned themselves and other women, as victims of an inherently unfair, misogynistic society in which their behaviours, appearances, characters and lifestyles were under constant scrutiny when compared with the men in their communities or families. When asked why they thought women were blamed for sexual violence, all answers contained a construction of a harmful, woman-hating society that judged, blamed and hurt them on a daily basis. They also constructed men as unanswerable to the same standards or judgement and often compared themselves to men when positioning themselves as affected by misogyny. In the talk, they used the comparisons with men's lives to construct a gap in justice and fairness in the way women were blamed for sexual violence.

Discussion

The results presented eight key themes that provide insight into the way women construct victim blaming and self-blame of women through talk. Through the use of interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions, women employed a complex and dynamic range of discursive tools to discuss victim blaming and self-blame in often contradictory and dichotomous ways.

As the most dominant interpretative repertoire, victim blaming, and self-blame had strong links to common rape myths and gender role stereotypes utilised in society. Women discussed every rape myth in the updated IRMAS subscales 1 (she asked for it) and 3 (It wasn't really rape) but did not mention or utilise any of the common rape myths from subscale 2 (he didn't mean to) or subscale 4 (she lied) (McMahon and Farmer, 2011). This is important because whilst the use of rape myths was frequent in the talk, none of the women positioned the perpetrators as not meaning

to hurt them and they did not position other women as lying about rape or sexual assault. They did however, use the remaining rape myths to talk about why other women were blamed, why they were personally blamed and why they blame themselves. Rape myths recurred in the talk, with participants using the commonly held myths to question themselves, their appearance, character and behaviour before, during and after they were raped or assaulted (Payne, 1999; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004).

In line with findings from others, the women in this study were aware of a 'perfect victim' stereotype arising from the powerful rape myths and victim stereotypes - and they did measure themselves against them (Campbell et al., 2001; Kahn et al., 1994; Koppelaar et al., 1997; Mont et al., 2003; Ryan, 1988;). Women talked about a hierarchy of victimhood in which they were measuring and positioning themselves against commonly held beliefs to assess whether they were a 'real' victim of rape or not. This is not necessarily because women did not believe they had been raped or abused, but seemingly because they were assessing whether others would see their culpability in the same way.

Sasha described her rape as 'as good as you're going to get' to mean that her rape and rapist fit all the ideal stereotypes of a 'real' rape in the interpretative repertoire that she hoped would protect her from blame. She was attacked in broad daylight, by an illegal immigrant who jumped out of a hidden space and raped her in the street in front of witnesses. She recognised that this rape fit a specific stereotype of rape and thought this would remove the victim blaming she may have faced. However, she then told how she realised she was not the 'perfect victim' when the police learned she had been raped before, that she had been drinking before the offence occurred and that she had mental health issues. She recognised that she was being

constructed as the non-credible victim and being measured against the commonly accepted rape myths and victim stereotypes, she had heard before.

Other women discussed how aware they were that the societal narratives about women's sexuality had positioned them as either deserving or sexual violence or deserving of some sort of punishment for being sexually active, dressing in revealing clothing or having multiple partners. In keeping with the findings from chapter 4, women in this study discussed the dichotomous expectation on women to be sexually available, to be sexy and attractive and to want sex with men – but that these wants and desires would result in more victim blaming because society had a problem with female sexuality and sexual pleasure. This echoes the arguments of Ringrose (2013) and Duschinsky (2013).

Women did wrestle with whether they deserved to be raped and abused, often concluding that they didn't know if they deserved it or not – or using an ideological dilemma which kept them stuck between feeling that no women deserved to be raped or abused, but often wondered whether they were subjected to sexual violence as a punishment because they had done something wrong. This bore strong similarities to the way BJW was theorised by Lerner (1980) and in the way Janoff-Bulman (1979) had theorised about characterological self-blame, in which the women had begun to consider if their personal characters or something about them was causing them to deserve sexual violence.

All women experienced victim blaming and self-blame and described the profound impact this had on them, most often resulting in them changing something about themselves. Janoff-Bulman (1979) argued that self-blame could be adaptive and positive because it could help women subjected to sexual violence to feel more in

control by changing something about themselves to avoid future revictimisation. However, this assertion was not supported by the current study, as although women did blame themselves, and they did try to change something about themselves, this did not make them feel more in control or empowered. They described years of questioning themselves, over-analysing themselves, over-thinking their experiences, decisions and characters, but they did not describe a feeling of control. In fact, two women described it as feeling like they were ‘going crazy’.

Participants also did not appear to believe that the changes they made would protect them from further sexual violence. This finding is important both for research and for practical applications in the world. Women are often told to change something about themselves, to become more aware, to educate themselves or to learn to spot the signs of a rapist or abuser. Despite all women in the sample applying this interpretative repertoire to their own lives and even following the explicit advice from family, friends and professionals to change something about themselves, this was constructed as dilemmatic because women did not believe it would protect them from sexual violence despite making the changes.

Women who had been blamed for sexual violence made significant changes to their lives that were either perceived as related to the offence (stopped drinking in bars) or were not related at all to the offence (quit job as a dance teacher years later) but felt protective or relevant. Women often accepted the interpretative repertoire for long periods of time before it became dilemmatic, with some women making life changes for years before realising that they were not protective – or spending decades trying to protect themselves better whilst still being abused by partners or family members. Women therefore had a complicated relationship with the discourse that women should change themselves to protect themselves from sexual violence. Although

they did accept this to be true and they did make changes, in the interviews they constructed this as a contradictory and complex issue in which they had slowly come around to a new understanding that the messages they had been given were wrong, they had not protected them, and they had restricted their lives.

Looking past the rape myths, many of the other findings were highly dynamic and dilemmatic. Women did not construct victim blaming or self-blame as passively absorbed from society or from their support network, rather, it was more complicated. Women did talk about messages in society, media, policing, law, communities and culture and did apply them to themselves, but they also rejected them. Whilst women positioned themselves as to blame for sexual violence and some even directly said that they still felt they were to blame for rape, assaults and abuse, they simultaneously stated that they 'knew' they were not to blame. There was a clear dilemma for women between 'knowing' and 'feeling' self-blame.

It appears that participants constructed self-blame as existing on two competing levels. Women described a difference between feeling to blame for sexual violence and knowing whether they were actually to blame for the offence. This suggests that despite the harmful victim blaming the women experienced, and the self-blame they still felt years later, there was a level of reasoning that rejected those narratives and constructed the perpetrator as to blame for sexual violence. However, this created a dilemma in the talk, in which women said they knew they were not to blame, but still felt to blame. The phrase 'deep down' was used repeatedly, as though women were alluding to a feeling of self-blame that was much deeper than logical, rational thoughts about sexual violence perpetrator and victim roles.

Women positioned themselves as to blame for sexual violence by labelling themselves unassertive or lacking in confidence, which supports previous arguments by Livingston et al. (2007) and Macy et al. (2006) that women who are not assertive blame themselves for sexual violence. Further, low assertiveness of women is argued to be related to repeat sexual victimisation (Greene & Navarro, 1998). One of the main reasons given by women for blaming themselves was because they knew they were being abused or raped but felt that they could not do anything stop the perpetrator. However, this self-blame for lack of action contrasted with descriptions that indicated that every woman interviewed did do something to try to stop the perpetrator, despite feeling that they didn't. Participants reported that they said no repeatedly to the perpetrator, tried to talk their way out of situation, tried to appease the offender, pushed him away and resisted – but they still also positioned themselves as not having done enough to stop him. They talked frequently about not having the confidence to have stopped the perpetrator, and as they spoke, they often finished sentences with the phrase 'there was nothing I could do', as they positioned themselves as powerless to the offence.

This has important implications for sexual refusal assertiveness research and programmes, because the premise of such research and programmes (Kitzinger and Frith, 1999; Women & Equalities Committee, 2016) are based on the view that women were raped because they did not assert themselves, did not try to stop the offender or did not say 'no' clearly enough (which is a rape myth used in the U-IRMAS). However, the current research suggests that the participants interviewed all tried repeatedly to stop the offence but seemingly due to the rape myths and interpretative repertoire that they should have done something differently or more

radical to prevent the offence, the women still reported feeling that they didn't do enough.

Finally, women positioned themselves as victims of a misogynistic and patriarchal society that simultaneously objectified, sexualised, controlled, judged, discriminated against and mistreated them. They were very aware of the social constructions of women's gender roles and how they were 'supposed' to behave, appear and live their lives. Participants described victim blaming as a symptom of a misogynistic society that repeatedly provides hostile messages about women through the media and does not hold men responsible for their sexual or violent offences towards women. Victim blaming was explained using contrasting experiences for men and women in which women were positioned as more harshly judged for every day behaviours or experiences than men.

Reflexive comment

Conducting this study was a humbling experience and provided a number of learning curves for me. I was struck by how complex the narratives were, how informed the women were about the origins of victim blaming and how clearly they saw and labelled misogyny. The women I interviewed understood rape myths and could easily identify sources of victim blaming, sexism and misogyny that they felt had influenced the blame and self-blame they experienced. It struck me that the women I interviewed understood and articulated the dynamics they live in, they named male violence confidently and they also called out victim blaming as and when they saw it. This means that I must have been holding some pre-existing belief that the women I interviewed would not be able to explain the origins and motivations for blaming women, which surprised me.

This confronted me with my second learning curve – that women were not passively absorbing victim blaming, self-blame or misogyny from society and support networks. Their descriptions suggested that they were wrestling with it, fighting it, interrogating it, challenging it and resenting it. Despite this messy process, they did blame themselves. However, they did not do this in a one-dimensional, linear, passive way. They blamed themselves but simultaneously told themselves that they were not to blame. They changed something about themselves but simultaneously knew that changing themselves would not protect them from sexual violence. They questioned their behaviours and characters, but they also criticised themselves for doing this. Clearly, self-blame and acceptance of victim blaming and rape myths was much more complicated and fraught than I had been led to believe by the literature.

Conclusion

By centring the voices of women and exploring the discursive tools they used to construct victim blaming and self-blame, this study has highlighted that women have a complex, challenging and active relationship with victim blaming of themselves and self-blame. Rather than positioning themselves as passively and naively accepting rape myths, victim blaming, self-blame and misogyny due to lack of understanding or awareness – women actively interrogated, criticised and attempted to reject blame for sexual violence perpetrated against them. Despite this construction of self being hopeful and active, women were simultaneously aware of how others perceived them to be to blame for sexual violence and utilised the interpretative repertoires in society to compare their sexual violence against the victim blaming messages and rape myths they knew they would encounter.

Sequential learning: Implications of findings for the next study

This section will discuss how the findings from this study influenced the aims of the next study. The study reported in Chapter 6 is a qualitative semi-structured interview study that seeks to explore the way professionals construct the victim blaming and self-blame of women after sexual violence. This study was designed to use the same questions as the previous study, to explore whether professionals working in sexual violence had a similar way of understanding and constructing victim blaming and self-blame as the women whom they are supporting.

In this chapter, the findings suggested that women were dynamic thinkers who understood the origins of victim blaming, challenged and rejected victim blaming whilst also believing and applying it to themselves. It was therefore important to take the findings from this chapter and explore whether the professionals working with women subjected to sexual violence also perceived women as dynamic, informed thinkers who could hold conflicting, simultaneous interpretative repertoires and dilemmas. The way professionals use language to construct women, self-blame and victim blaming may be important to practice and the experiences of women subjected to sexual violence.

Chapter 6

Study 3: Professional's constructions of victim blaming and self-blame of women subjected to sexual violence: A critical discursive analysis

Abstract

Utilising a semi-structured interview framework and critical discursive analysis, this study explores the way professionals who work with women subjected to sexual violence use talk to construct their understanding and experiences of victim blaming and self-blame. A secondary research question also explored how they use talk to work with women who blame themselves for sexual violence perpetrated against them. Interviews with eleven professionals from three support services presented six key discourses that were used by professionals to talk about victim blaming of women and self-blame of women. Discourses used by participants positioned women as helpless to absorbing victim blaming beliefs and self-blame from society and, their families. Talk was often dilemmatic, with professionals positioning women as easily adopting victim blaming and self-blame discourses from others, but then positioning them as resistant to new discourses introduced by the professional to reduce self-blame or victim blaming.

Introduction

To build on and support the previous study exploring the way women construct victim blaming and self-blame through talk, this study sought to explore how professionals working directly with women subjected to sexual violence would construct the same issues. The victim blaming and self-blame of women has been shown to be common (Ullman, 2010). Studies with the general public have found

high levels of victim blaming of women (Fawcett Society, 2017; McMahon, 2010) and specific studies with women who have been subjected to sexual violence have found that many of them were blamed and blamed themselves (Ben-David and Schneider, 2005; Donde et al., 2018; Relyea & Ullman, 2015; Sleath, 2011).

In the UK, support services for women subjected to sexual violence are predominantly provided by the charitable sector. Services include helplines, advice and counselling services, Independent Sexual Violence Advocate (ISVAs), victim support services, domestic and sexual violence refuges and peer support services (Du Mont et al., 2003; Maier, 2013). Professionals working in the sectors that support women subjected to sexual violence have been shown to accept rape myths and victim blaming beliefs at around the same rate as the general public (Martin, 2005; Sleath, 2011). Older qualitative research found that rape victim advocates held beliefs that rape was a crime of power but did endorse the rape myth that men who rape women are sick or mentally ill (Andersen & Renzetti, 1980).

Despite these professionals working in this sector, there is little qualitative research exploring how professionals understand victim stereotypes, self-blame and victim blaming of women subjected to sexual violence (Maier, 2013). Research about victim blaming of women tends to focus on quantitative, self-report measure studies which led to calls for more naturalistic, conversation-based research (Anderson, 1999). Of the small number of qualitative studies with sexual violence support professionals, the focus tended to be on service delivery or barriers to collaboration with other services (Campbell, 1998; Maier, 2013; Payne, 2007).

The second issue to explore is whether and how professionals could work with women to support them to understand that they are not to blame for sexual violence.

Victim blaming and self-blame of women has been shown to be influenced by and constructed with language and discourses about women, sexual violence and blame. Relativist approaches to language propose that language constructs reality, meaning that the words we use to express our ideas and narratives about ourselves and the world can give us clues to the power dynamics, constructions, positions and dilemmas in social issues (Edley, 2001; Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2014).

Given these issues, the current study sought to explore the way professionals working with women subjected to sexual violence described and constructed victim blaming and self-blame. Secondly, the study sought to explore how professionals talked about their role in helping women to reduce feelings of self-blame and the harm caused by victim blaming. This study sought to listen to professionals working with women subjected to sexual violence, and to present the discursive tools utilised to construct victim blaming and self-blame of the women they support. By employing a critical discursive analysis, this study aims to answer the research question:

How do professionals use language to construct their understanding of victim blaming and self-blame of women who have been subjected to sexual violence?

Method

As methodological approach has been discussed in the methodology chapter and the method for this study was identical to the method taken for the previous study, this method section has been reduced to only contain differences. For a detailed method section, please see Chapter 5. Ethical approval for this study can be seen at Appendix 8.

Participants

The sample for this study was eleven professionals working in sexual violence support services, working with caseloads of women who had been subjected to sexual violence and abuse. All professionals were female apart from one male. Professionals came from three different sexual violence support services in the Midlands, UK. Whilst all professionals supported women after sexual violence, they took on a variety of roles including counsellors, psychotherapists, addiction counsellor, ISVA (independent sexual violence advocate), counselling managers and CEO of rape and sexual violence centre. All participants were female except one who was a male counsellor working with women who had been raped or abused and developed addictions. There was no stipulation for participants to be female, but only one male applied to take part in this study. Having one male participant does present an important challenge for this study, especially as some could argue that he has a different perspective as a male who is not subjected to the same experiences as females in the workplace or in his life. However, his responses were not noted to be particularly different from the responses of the female professionals in this study and he did not appear to demonstrate any divergent views to any of the other participants.

Materials

This qualitative research design required information and consent forms (Appendix 15), semi-structured interview schedule of questions (Appendix 16), a debrief sheet (Appendix 17) and a Dictaphone to record interviews.

Procedure

Full information about the study was shared with three independent sexual violence support services and women's centres in the UK, asking them to make staff and managers aware that there was an opportunity to take part in anonymous research about victim blaming and self-blame. There was no deception or withheld information in the call for participants. Professionals who were interested in taking part expressed their interest to the service leaders or contacted the researcher directly. The researcher met with the professionals and conducted the interviews in the confidential counselling rooms at each service. Professionals were able to book times and dates that were suitable for them to take part or could take part over the phone if this would be easier for them. Eight professionals took part in the study in face-to-face interviews and three chose to take part over the phone due to their schedules.

In advance of meetings and telephone calls, all participants were sent copies of the information sheet and consent form to read and consider. Participants were invited to ask any further questions before the interview or on the day. All professionals read the information and signed consent forms before taking part in the interviews.

Interviews varied from around 35 minutes to 75 minutes and were based on the questions set out in the semi-structured interview question schedule. After interviews ended, the researcher spent some time talking to participants to debrief from the session and to answer any questions they had about the study. At this point, participants were reminded that they would be invited to comment on the interpretation of the data and the findings from this research and that the researcher would be back in touch in the future.

Throughout the process of data collection and data analysis the researcher kept a reflexive diary and attended clinical supervision with a trained supervisor. The reflexive diary is a recommended approach to keeping the thoughts, feelings and experiences of the researcher visible and accountable in qualitative research (Ortlipp, 2008). Rather than trying to control the impact of the researcher, in qualitative research it is important to acknowledge and embrace the decisions and interpretations of the researcher (Harrison et al., 2001; Ortlipp, 2008).

Analysis of interview data

The same analytic steps were followed as described in the previous chapter. Data was transcribed, anonymised and all names were replaced by a pseudonym. Transcriptions were then explored using Wetherell et al. (2014) approaches to discourse analysis; through three steps of familiarisation of the data, exploring the data for themes and discursive tools and working back through the annotated transcripts with a second coder to label and describe the discursive tools being used by participants. All stages of analysis with examples are included in Appendix 14.

Professionals were also invited to give feedback on the findings and chapter written here before it was submitted. All professionals were contacted by email with copies of the findings from discourse analysis and a final draft copy of this chapter. They were given a month to submit any written feedback if they wanted it to be included in this chapter. Out of eleven professionals, seven wrote back with feedback reported below.

Learning from feedback

Professionals replied with a wide range of responses to their interviews and the findings from the study. All thanked me for the work and expressed interest in taking

part and the added opportunity of being able to read the discourse analysis findings and a copy of this chapter. One woman wrote back to say, '*It made interesting, but quite honestly surprising reading. I actually felt really sad to read the professional perspectives of victim blaming. It reads almost that professionals have very little in the way of hope for the women we support.'* This response was shared by another professional who wrote: *'It was clearly a really difficult topic with many contradictions that you must have struggled with- we didn't present you with a very straight forward and coherent set of responses did we!?'*

The feedback I received from professionals sparked long conversations about how we could move forward and change practice to ensure women and girls were getting the best service from professionals who may feel that deconstructing feelings of blame is difficult to do. It was an important and enlightening process to talk to participants about their interpretation, of my own interpretation of their talk. All participants felt that they were fairly represented, but most expressed surprise at some of the findings from others and when grouped together.

Results

This section will present the results from the critical discourse analysis to answer the research question: *How do professionals use language to construct their understanding of victim blaming and self-blame of women who have been subjected to sexual violence?*

The secondary research question: *How do professionals talk about supporting women who blame themselves for sexual violence?*

Table 26: Key discursive tools used by professionals to talk about victim blaming and self-blame of women

Discursive tool	Number of Participants	Occurrences in speech
Rape myths	11	17
Women who cannot deconstruct self-blame must have childhood traumas	7	15
Women positioned as passive and helpless to absorbing victim blaming into their own belief system	11	18
Family are positioned as the most important factor in victim blaming and self-blame of women	11	21
Telling a woman that she is not to blame does not mean she will feel a reduction of blame	11	19
Direct versus indirect challenge of self-blame	9	14

Findings are presented as interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positioning in the language of the participants (IR, ID, and SP, respectively). Multiple codes could be applied if sentences or passages contained multiple discursive tools. However, important consideration must be given to the fact that ideological dilemmas and subject positioning of self and others are often influenced by and interlinked with interpretative repertoires and so presenting them as separate artefacts in language is not always helpful.

Rape myths

Rape myths were discussed frequently by all participants, who cited rape myths as the main reason they believed women were still being blamed for sexual violence. As a dominant interpretative repertoire, participants quickly and frequently gave

examples of rape myths affecting the women they work with and affecting other parts of practice such as law, health care and therapy. Participants gave hundreds of examples of rape myths being used in the lives of the women they were supporting.

Extract 1:

GEORGIA: *There is quite a lot, you know, if you wear – wore certain colour shoes or if you wore short – a short skirt or all that usual stuff; you wear too much make-up. And then you go out drinking and that, then, you know, what do you expect?*

Extract 2:

SARA: *Erm, but I think in general there's this kind of culture of focussing on women were wearing, whether they were drinking alcohol at the time, what their sort of history has been of sexual relationships, whether sort of put themselves in a vulnerable position. And so I think there's like a real culture of trying to explain it away.*

Extract 3:

SAMMI: *And I think that it is easy to say, "Well she should have kept her legs crossed," or, "She should have fought more," or, "She should have screamed." And again, if you don't have that understanding of perhaps how the body responds to that, you know, that fight/flight response, then yes it's very easy to say well, "You know, she should have fought him off," or, "She should have screamed louder."*

Participants spoke about rape myths, generally in third person, as if they were talking about what they had heard others say about women. They construct the use of long

lists of rape myths as a cultural or societal issue and whilst they distanced themselves from that culture or society, they talked about the way women they worked with would employ the same rape myths when deciding whether to tell their family or friends what had happened, supporting existing evidence (Mont et al., 2003; Campbell et al., 2001; Ullman, 2010) .

Extract 4:

MADDY*: Societal (sighs) responses I've encountered are quite negative. I think that's a massive, massive problem that we've got, um, just through the myths and stereotypes that are just rife within society. And so many people that I work with actually don't tell the nearest people to them because of those myths and stereotypes, that they won't be believed. And – or they are gonna think it's their fault and – and, you know, they've asked for it, so to speak.*

Maddy was not the only participant to describe rape myths as a 'massive' problem. In fact, every participant situated rape myths and victim blaming of women as coming from 'society'. Often, participants would separate themselves from the construct of society in their talk and talked in third person about the society that uses rape myths and stereotypes – positioning society as the problem, positioning themselves as outside of that problem. Professionals described victim blaming as being used by people from the rest of society, outside of the field of sexual violence support.

Extract 5:

FAY*: I think there is a large proportion of society though who are at one end of – of the scale which would give a, um, a response which is blaming,*

unsupportive, um, cruel, um, (…). Some of them are all formed – most of them, all of them, are formed around the myths of sexual violence.

Extract 6:

JULIANNA: *Er, I think society at large don't like to think that people are, are, are capable of conscious acts like that.*

Extract 7:

ROB: *Almost saying, well she asked for it, and that, that kind of – you know, putting yourself in a vulnerable position – I just think, you know, society infects everything with that general view.*

Participants positioned themselves as different and separate from the society that used rape myths to blame women for sexual violence. Society is constructed as a judgemental, uneducated, all-encompassing force that could influence millions of people to accept the rape myth discourses in order to blame women. In extract 7, Rob describes societal rape myths as 'infecting' everything with a general view that women 'ask for it' or put themselves in positions where they are sexually harmed.

Women who cannot deconstruct self-blame must have childhood traumas

One of the most frequent themes in the data was an interpretative repertoire that was utilised by 7 of the 11 participants. This common narrative was an explanation about women who struggle to let go of, or challenge self-blame, which the 7 participants put down to the woman having childhood traumas that left her weaker, with lower self-esteem or lower self-worth which meant she was unable to deconstruct the victim blaming being put towards her, and the feelings of self-blame she had about herself. Charlotte went further and positioned women who could not

challenge victim blaming or feelings of self-blame as not sophisticated or mature enough to realise what was happening to them, which strongly contrasts with the findings from the previous study with women themselves (Chapter 5).

Extract 8:

CHARLOTTE: *They're not sophisticated enough, they're not mature enough to recognise what has happened to them. So it's – again it's a really subtle process. So I think in – in people who've been abused in childhood, it's really easy to see how the blame gets shifted to them, um, through the process of grooming, um, and then they're not able to get out of it*

Extract 9:

TERI: *So is it, is it possible with everybody to turn that off completely for life? No I don't, sadly I don't think it is, I think you will always have people that will always feel that it's – they have some connection to, to the abuse in some form. And I think probably more so in the people that have been abused from a very young age or the people that have, um, been groomed*

Participants positioned some women as beyond help if they were abused in childhood – positioning the belief of blame as so deeply embedded and accepted by the woman that it would be very difficult for anyone to challenge it or reduce it. Teri frames some girls who have been groomed in childhood as having a 'connection to the abuse' and that they will 'always feel' that way (blame themselves for sexual violence). Whilst this does not directly blame the women for sexual violence, it does position them as being 'connected' and unable to 'turn it off', which positions them as unchangeable or helpless.

Extract 10:

JULIANNA: *the person has then become accustomed to, this, this is what happens and there is no way to fight it or um – so they just have a very strong belief, I think they are conditioned to accept that's just, that's just my lot in life.*

Extract 11:

SARA: *I think it's so evident to me that people who had sort of really, really difficult early childhoods and relationships and sort of very difficult relationships where they haven't been valued it's so much more difficult, erm, to work through those beliefs about themselves than it is with someone who's got a different kind of foundation.*

Extract 12:

MADDY: *It's a really difficult one that is, because if they don't have kind of – if it is just them telling themselves that, "Well, I deserved that" then (pause) my experience tells me that well, that person's self-worth is so very small to begin with so there must have been something either missing or something that's happened before that.*

Maddy's account bore striking resemblance to that of Jane in the previous chapter, who talked about her self-esteem being so low that she sometimes believed she was to blame and positioned herself as a 'freak' who no one would believe. However, Jane stated that the sexual violence eroded her self-esteem whilst Maddy positioned women who blame themselves as already having something 'either missing or something that's happened before'. This supports work by Maier (2013) that professionals can successfully break down some myths about victims (by talking about rape myths openly and critically) but can still hold other victim blaming beliefs.

There were no other explanations offered by the participants to account for why some women might struggle to deal with feelings of self-blame. When asked whether there were some women who found self-blame difficult to shift, all participants who discussed this topic unanimously answered that it would be the women who were also abused in childhood. This was an interpretative repertoire that was utilised and discussed in the same way across 9 participants, suggesting either that women who were abused in childhood do seem to struggle much more with reducing feelings of self-blame as suggested by some research (Filipas & Ullman, 2006; Messman-Moore & Long, 2003), or that participants have constructed those women to be more accepting of victim blaming and self-blame because they have suffered from it for much longer. In extract 12, Maddy describes women who cannot reduce their feelings of self-blame as having 'something missing or something that's happened before'. In turn, this meant that participants were constructing some women as better at reducing feelings of self-blame than others. This finding is of interest, as some professionals have constructed women as traumatised victims, trapped inside a belief of self-blame that they cannot get out of.

Women positioned as passive and helpless to absorbing victim blaming into their own belief system

This theme contained two competing subject positions of women as simultaneously passive, helpless and powerless to absorbing victim blaming beliefs but also strongly resistant to absorbing counter-narratives and beliefs. Within the talk, this created an ideological dilemma for participants who frequently described self-blame as a feeling that women absorb from society without any interrogation but also identified hat the same women were resistant to new beliefs from the participant.

When talking about where self-blame comes from in women who have been subjected to sexual violence, participants constructed women as passive, with the words ‘internalise’, ‘absorb’, ‘accept’, ‘adopt’, ‘automatically take on’ and ‘believe’ used frequently. Women were constructed to be highly influenced by others and not able to challenge or confront victim blaming, which they believed completely.

Extract 13:

MADDY*: In the beginning stages of therapy they absolutely believe whoever’s told them so that they – that is – now become their belief.*

RESEARCHER: *Right okay. Yeah.*

MADDY: *So they’ve kind of opened up to their sister or whoever. They’ve reflected that, that they shouldn’t have put themselves in that position and it is their fault, then they adopt that.*

Extract 14:

GEORGIA*: I think at the time she had no other option other than to, obviously this is my mum telling me ‘I’m bad, I’m doing the wrong thing.’*

Extract 15:

TARA: *But over the years what I have seen is more that people do tend to soak up those messages. It’s somehow it’s that way their brain works isn’t it?*

Further than this, participants positioned women as naïve absorbers of other’s beliefs, in which they will quickly adopt another point of view or perception of blame without argument, because they have low self-worth.

Extract 16:

GEORGIA: *So their – their self-worth is based on what other people tell them they're worth*.

RESEARCHER: *Yeah.*

GEORGIA: *So they haven't really, um, developed their own sense of who they are and they haven't any sense of value for themselves other than what other people give them. So that's, um, they're always dependent on the opinion of others.*

Extract 17:

JULIANNA: *And very often they internalise that, I lied so I deserved it, so it's all my fault. (Sighs) Sadly it's not hard to convince someone that they are too blame, um, it can be done really quite subtlety without the words; it's your fault, you caused it.*

However, despite the frequent positioning of women as passive to the internalisation of new narratives or beliefs about blame, the same participants also positioned women as being strongly resistant to new beliefs that counter self-blame, presenting evidence of an ideological dilemma about the passivity and agency of women.

Extract 18:

MADDY: *Absolutely, yeah. And I guess it's (pause) it's a time game with them, because, you know, um, you – you work with – with your client at their pace as well, so with those that are really kind of – I guess (sighs) just in that bubble of self-blame and they are resistant to even entertaining the idea that it actually might not be, it lengthens the work. Makes it twice as long.*

Extract 19:

JULIANNA: *Yeah, I think there are, there are clients like that who are completely closed to the thought that, you know, it could be anyone else's responsibility*

In Extract 20 below, Fay describes the way women might challenge her when she is trying to convince them that they are not to blame and that they defend their beliefs. This is very different from the construction of women as being helpless and powerless to new beliefs and perceptions of sexual violence. Women subjected to sexual violence are described as passively, automatically taking on a new belief but also defensively and actively challenging a second new belief.

Extract 20:

FAY: *And really, you know, get going on high level challenge, um, so timing is important. I suppose, um, wh- you've got to look at if you're challenged in defence, if it's a part of a person's defence, that there needs to be something else in place that they can draw on because a defence is a strategy.*

This theme suggests an ideological dilemma in which women are positioned as both passive and active in constructing their beliefs about self-blame. This could be due to the strengths of the messages, in which victim blaming and self-blame of women is possibly a more powerful and common narrative and so more readily accepted by the women – but the counter-narrative that it was not their fault is possibly more uncommon and less readily accepted by women. It could also be that when participants describe women as passively absorbing self-blame and victim blaming from others, they assume that the process was quick and passive, rather than being a difficult, complex process in which her beliefs are changed or confirmed, or both.

Arguably, if professionals had initially constructed women as passive, defenceless and easy to convince of new beliefs about themselves, this theme may present discourses of frustration when women do not accept their new, more positive beliefs, being presented to them by the professionals.

Family are positioned as the most important factor in victim blaming and self-blame of women

This theme was one of the most commonly utilised interpretative repertoires and ideological dilemmas in the study, with all participants positioning the family unit as being the most influential and pivotal factor that would influence self-blame and the acceptance of victim blaming. However, the discussion around the support network of family and friends became more complicated, with participants describing the support network as the most important part of the help and recovery a woman might need, even though every participant described the family as being the main source of victim blaming and feelings of self-blame. So, whilst the family were described as causing harm to the woman (which supports findings from Campbell et al. (2001) and Kalra and Bhugra, 2013), the family were still positioned as the most important factor for the woman's support and recovery.

All participants positioned the family as a key source of victim blaming and feelings of self-blame for women subjected to sexual violence.

Extract 21:

RESEARCHER: *Where do you see victim blaming coming from?*

MADDY*: From – from everybody around them really. Everybody around them. Their entire support network and I do think that because it's not supportive at*

all. Um, but that's who they will turn to naturally and then they get, "Well, why on earth would you have done that?"

Extract 22:

GEORGIA*: Often the families blame the victim and it seems to be a lot of the blame isn't around so much that they caused that to happen although there is some – some feeling of that happened to you so now you are the (pause) the – the raped person in the family.*

RESEARCHER: *Yeah. Yeah.*

GEORGIA: *Um, but more to do with now that you've brought this to light, especially if the perpetrator is a family member, now you've brought this to light you've disrupted the family.*

RESEARCHER: *Ah okay.*

GEORGIA: *So there's blame around the impact.*

Extract 23:

SAMANTHA: *Police got involved, you know, by bringing it out in the open you've brought shame on the family.*

Participants described the way the family responded was not what the woman had expected and the lack of support or the direct victim blaming was a shock and disappointment. Participants described the family as a source of great harm when they blamed the woman for sexual abuse or rape, and positioned the women as expecting her family to be the ones who would protect and support her. This mirrors previous research findings (Campbell et al., 2001; Ullman, 1996; 1999).

Extract 24:

GEORGIA: *their family don't – don't accept them so if the family don't accept them then who can? Then how – but they're almost like the – the safety net, aren't they? They – they're at the bottom of the – well, the last resource that you know that you can rely on them for that sort of – that sort of glimmer of hope.*

RESEARCHER: *Yeah.*

GEORGIA: *And it's almost like you could go go through everyone else…but you know that they'll catch you. If they don't catch you then – then why – why do you care what happens?*

RESEARCHER: *Yeah.*

GEORGIA: *And I'm sure there are – they'll be other people out there but the – what the expectation is that they would be the strongest.*

Despite the way the family was constructed as the main source of victim blaming, they were simultaneously but tentatively, constructed as the main source of support and safety. As in extract 24 when Georgia positioned the family as 'the last resource' and 'a glimmer of hope', in extract 25, Teri describes the family as a support network that we all need:

Extract 25:

TERI: *But working with so many people that haven't told anybody in their life is really hard because then they don't have that support network that we all need.*

This is particularly interesting because it supports findings by Ullman (1996; 1999) who found that when the family network was negative, it had a negative impact on women, but that women still disclosed to the family more than any other group. This presents a dilemma for women, who may expect their families to be supportive and disclose sexual violence to them but are frequently blamed and ostracised, not only for the sexual violence but for the reputation or perception of the family network (White & Rollins, 1981; Mason et al., 2008).

Telling a woman that she is not to blame does not mean she will feel a reduction of blame

All participants talked about the process of challenging victim blaming and self-blame of women as an ideological dilemma. Throughout the talk, participants described their methods and approaches to challenging victim blaming and self-blame, often caveating their sentences with a competing belief that telling a woman that she is not to blame is often not enough to make a difference to her feelings of blame. They explained this, despite continuing to tell the woman she was not to blame. This constructed the woman as resistant to changing her beliefs about blame in sexual violence and in some cases, positioned their own roles and influence as futile. Notably, this is in stark contrast with the second theme in which women were positioned as passive and helpless to absorbing new discourses into their own.

Extract 26:

MADDY: *Rather than when they're not ready to hear it and you're kind of – and you then keep saying it, "No, no, no, yeah." Cos sometimes it is – because it's – it's so traumatic, what we're talking about, that it can take a long time for people to really digest things.*

RESEARCHER: *Yeah.*

MADDY: *And start challenging I guess also their own beliefs.*

Extract 27:

SAMANTHA: *Um, but I don't think that goes in straight away, I don't think that's – I don't think that that person feels when they walk out of their first meeting with me – 'oh great, I wasn't to blame'.*

RESEARCHER: *Yeah.*

SAMANTHA: *And 'I'm okay now'. No way. I think that takes time and I think that takes support and I think that takes almost that the person needs to be, um, supported to almost rebuild their like sense of self, you know, and how they maybe see themselves.*

Extract 28:

CHARLOTTE: *So some just cry because they do recognise that what I'm saying is true, actually, um, and others will kind of, they'll say, 'Yes I know,' but they're still holding the belief.*

All participants in this study presented two discourses in tandem, the first being that they always tried to challenge victim blaming and self-blame, and the second being that even though they continued to challenge, it often didn't result in the woman blaming herself any less than before. Participants also frequently positioned knowledge as different from feeling. Therefore, they felt that the women with whom they worked could have the knowledge that they were not to blame; but, could still feel to blame, as is evident in the extract from Charlotte, above. She positions her counternarrative as 'true' and her role as trying to get the woman to believe the 'truth'

that she was not to blame; but, she also knows that even when women told her they knew they were not to blame, they still held beliefs that they were to blame.

Some participants also discussed a feeling that if they were to continue to tell the woman she was not to blame when she was not ready to gain a new belief or change her own beliefs, this would be the same as imposing new views on her in the same way that the victim blaming views were imposed on her. Tara and Rob both presented dilemmatic constructions of challenging self-blame, in which they were committed to challenging self-blame, but were simultaneously concerned that challenging self-blame could cause more harm to the woman and disempower her further.

Extract 29:

TARA: *But actually if I do try and, you know, do the kind of the exploring and unpicking, the reframing, that could do her more harm than good. And I kind of got to a point where I thought, you know, in a way I felt like I was sort of putting forward my sort of, you know, apportioning of blame and responsibility and where it lies. But in some ways, was it not more important to respect that's how she wanted and needed, that's how she needed to see it, that's how she needed to look at it.*

Extract 30:

ROB: *But fundamentally, it's right in that, if you just impose another – another view, it is, if you like – because often these messages are deep seated, so it's just a societal message that women are often to blame, or always to blame… Then, just to say, 'no, you're – you're talking nonsense, it is just – you know,*

all of the messages you've had are plain wrong,' I think is just imposing another view, and not – not overly helpful.

This ideological dilemma has strong links with one of the findings from the previous study, 'Knowing logically that she is not to blame but still feeling to blame'. As one of the ideological dilemmas discussed by the women themselves, it is of interest that this was replicated in this study with professionals working with women. They talked in similar terms, using similar words to construct a feeling in which women 'know' they are not really to blame for sexual violence, but deeper down, still feel they are. Out of eleven participants, six explained this ideological dilemma between knowing and feeling, with Georgia explaining it in almost the exact same way as the women in the previous study.

Extract 31:

GEORGIA: *I say, "At some level it feels to me that you know you're not to blame."*

RESEARCHER: Hmm.

GEORGIA: *"However, feeling that you're not to blame is completely different." So a hundred people can probably say, you know, "You were – you were six years old. There's no way you can be to blame; that – that's just not possible. But actually feeling that is completely different." So we – we'd be working with, you know, getting from the knowing to the feeling. If you see what I mean?*

RESEARCHER: Yeah.

GEORGIA: *Yeah. And – and at a logical level there's that knowledge and everything out there, the media, whatever and – and – and if you think of it in an obvious way, it's in a practical way, then you couldn't be to blame.*

Just like the women in the previous study, participants often used words like logical and rational, which constructed the self-blame and victim blaming as irrational or illogical. However, they all agreed that women did 'know' at a logical level, that they were not to blame but 'felt' at a deeper level that they were to blame for sexual violence. This dichotomy continued throughout both studies.

Direct versus indirect challenge of self-blame

The final theme from the data was another ideological dilemma which was constructed by the participants when considering how to challenge self-blame of women who had been blamed for sexual violence. This theme was specifically about the techniques and approaches used by the participants when working with women to help them to understand victim blaming and self-blame. Participants working with the women described themselves as 'direct' but also showed concern about being direct in their approaches about blame.

Every participant discussed this issue, with some participants describing their approach as very direct or 'head on', constructing their challenge of the woman's beliefs as necessary and in pursuit of a better understanding for the woman. Others were more cautious and discussed the process of challenging self-blame and victim blaming as being a sensitive and tentative process, in which they worried about harming the woman by challenging deeply held beliefs, even when they didn't agree with them.

Extract 32:

TARA: *Because I think you have got to be very – absolutely I, I challenge and, and I have done over the years and I think it's important that sometimes that I have been more directive with some people than I would be with others. But I think you have got to be careful that it isn't done because somebody has got to be at a point that actually they are ready and open to receive that challenge and actually be ready to start to kind of take that on board and explore it.*

Extract 33:

CHARLOTTE: *I usually just challenge that thinking. So in the example you just gave, I'd would say, but is that really the case? You know, was it the fact that you got a ta – you didn't get a taxi home or was it that actually that person's a rapist? So I challenge it quite head-on, really, um.*

Samantha expressed a fear that she could traumatise women by challenging their narratives of self-blame or belief in victim blaming.

Extract 34:

SAMANTHA: *I would say that, but I wouldn't labour the point probably. But if I – once – once I've built up a relationship with somebody and I feel that I can challenge them in a way that they – they know me by now and they respect, you know, that I'm not trying to hurt them, 'cos you've got to be careful. Well, I think – I think sometimes you've got to be careful not to re-kind of traumatise somebody.*

A number of participants, including Sara below, discussed an ideological dilemma in which they want to challenge self-blame and victim blaming, but were worried about

disempowering women by telling them that their beliefs are wrong. In the extract below, Sara describes the process as ‘holding back what I think but obviously not agreeing’. She also described offering what she thought with aggressive terms such as ‘jumping in’ and ‘shutting people down’, which led her to avoid that approach and to focus more on providing space for women to consider and think about self-blame and victim blaming themselves rather than being ‘told’ not to believe rape myths and victim blaming narratives about themselves.

Extract 35:

SARA: *And I think what I find, erm, difficult and I sort of go back and forth about this a lot is that people hold really deep-seated beliefs about, erm, the fact that it is their fault and they’re to blame and they’re responsible. And I think as a therapist countering that can also just shut people down…*

RESEARCHER: Yes, yeah.

SARA: …*erm, and leave them feeling more isolated with these feelings that are so, just so difficult to articulate and so so so painful, erm, that no, as, as a therapist I just want to say, “No, this is wrong,” like, “It’s not like that.” Like, “Please don’t feel like that.” But I think that that can, like it really sort of shakes people off. Erm, so I think, erm, part of my job is to let people explore those feelings and for me to hold back, erm, in some cases from saying what I think, erm, obviously not agreeing. But in part giving them space to talk about how that is for them to feel like that, what their experience is rather than jumping in and saying, “No, that’s not how you should be feeling.”*

Tara also explained why she was not able to be direct, positioning women as being more comfortable with self-blame and victim blaming than having to confront the

reality of sexual violence being uncontrollable; something which Janoff-Bulman theorised in 1979. In the extract below, Tara appears concerned that by being too direct when women were not ready to hear that it was not their fault, she presents them with constructions of sexual violence and perpetrators that they may not be ready to accept. She discusses working with a woman who she had attempted to directly challenge about self-blame and victim blaming and had learned that attempting to deconstruct the self-blame narrative would leave the woman feeling more exposed, lacking in perceived control and would potentially make her feel worse.

Extract 36:

TARA: *Because she felt that that made it, she said, easier and safer for her to go forward knowing that it is preventable, it needn't happen again, because I will, I, I can take responsibility for it. Because she said, if I think that wasn't my fault, that was the perpetrators fault, she said to me that means it could happen again and that's less safe and I don't feel like I will – probably not those exact words but almost that I won't recover as well if I think it wasn't my, it wasn't my fault. Because it makes me feel like that could happen again at any point. She said I'd rather think, I'll take responsibility for what happened and then I feel more in control going forward. So that was an interesting one.*

This final theme presents some dilemmas for professionals supporting women, in which they continue to try to convince women that they are not to blame for sexual violence perpetrated against them, but also worry that they should not be too direct or challenging in case this damages the therapeutic relationship, retraumatises the woman or makes the woman feel as though she is being told that she is 'wrong'. At

some points, professionals constructed self-blame in a similar manner to Janoff-Bulman (1979), that self-blame is an attempt at adaptation and can in some cases, help women to feel more in control of what happened so they can prevent it from happening to them again. Tara also gives an example of a woman saying to her 'I'd rather think, I'll take responsibility for what happened and then I feel more in control going forward' which is a clear example of counterfactual thinking (Miller et al., 2010).

Discussion

The findings from this study present a complicated and dilemmatic construction of victim blaming and self-blame of women who have been subjected to sexual violence from the perspective of the professionals who support them.

Women were often discussed in disconnected dichotomies, in which professionals would describe women or blame in one way, but then later, describe them in the opposite way without connecting the two perspectives. They employed narratives and repertoires about blame and about women, that were at times, contradictory. Women were constructed as helpless, powerless and passive to beliefs about self-blame and victim blaming of women; but they were later constructed as resistant and challenging to new counternarratives about self-blame and victim blaming of women. This can be discussed in several ways. It is possible that women are both passive and active in the beliefs of victim blaming and self-blame – the ideological dilemma being caused by two competing interpretative repertoires and subject positions of women. It is interesting that women are positioned as passive to beliefs of society, their families and support network – but highly resistant to the professional supporting them.

It is also possible that the professionals construct women as passive to self-blame and victim blaming erroneously, and that the resistance they describe to alternatives to self-blame is also present in self-blame, but they assume that the woman is passive due to benevolent sexism or because they have constructed the woman as vulnerable. It is also of interest that the woman was only constructed as resistant, difficult or challenging when she was rejecting the narratives or challenges presented by the professional, but in all other terms, she was positioned as vulnerable and powerless.

This possible explanation of the dichotomy could link to the frequently used interpretative repertoire about women being unable to deconstruct self-blame and victim blaming narratives due to being abused in childhood. A lot of the times this was used in talk, the participant appeared to be assuming that the reason women may struggle to challenge self-blame is because she must have been abused in childhood which causes them to be powerless to the belief that they are to blame. This may present a circular discourse in which women are constructed as abused because they were powerless, and then powerless because they were abused. This finding could also relate to the way professionals in sexual violence are trained and to the research which suggests that women abused in childhood are more likely to blame themselves and are more likely to be continually revictimized in adulthood (Mason et al., 2008; Messman-Moore and Long, 2003). Again, the origins of the interpretative repertoire used by participants is unclear but may be representative of several associated factors. It could be that over the years of their role, participants have come to notice that women who were abused in childhood are more likely to blame themselves leading to a confirmation bias – or it could be that they hold stereotypes and beliefs that women who were abused in childhood are more

vulnerable, have lower self-worth and low self-esteem. A combination of those of these things could cause confirmation bias, and indeed the data was lacking in talk that constructed women as empowered, confident, assertive or capable (except for when participants were discussing their own concerns about women not believing their self-blame counternarrative).

In line with the existing literature (Campbell et al., 2001; Ullman, 1996; 1999), the family was positioned by participants as being the most important factor in the support of a woman who has been subjected to sexual violence. However, in the talk, all participants constructed the family in a dilemmatic way: as being vital to the woman but also being the main source of victim blaming and cause of self-blame. Even when participants talked about how harmful the support network had been towards the woman, they still described them as being the most important 'safety net' a woman has.

The concept of 'knowing she is not to blame but still feeling to blame' arose in this study as it did in the previous study with women. There were two interpretative repertoires competing within the talk, with participants explaining that they continued to challenge victim blaming and self-blame with women, but they also knew that their approach would be unlikely to reduce victim blaming or self-blame. Despite the two competing approaches, all participants continued to use them in practice, perhaps representative of the hope that over long periods of time, women would eventually 'believe' them that they were not to blame for sexual violence. However, over half of the professional participants described blame as something deeper than knowledge and logic; they constructed self-blame of women as being something different to logical thinking. There were frequent discussions about blame being not being about 'knowing' but about 'feeling', in which women could 'know' they were not really to

blame for rape or sexual abuse, but still felt to blame. It was this irrational feeling of blame that participants described as being difficult to shift. Participants described the blame as being comforting in some cases, or as a way to retain control of their understanding of sexual violence. This has clear links to the way Janoff-Bulman (1979) constructed self-blame which has long been contested. It is of interest that so many current professionals working with women in sexual violence construct self-blame and victim blaming much in the same way as Janoff-Bulman (1979) despite self-blame and victim blaming being rejected as adaptive and comforting in more contemporary research (Frazier, 2005; Donde, 2016). Despite the similarities in discourses, participants in this study appeared to be more nuanced than the theory suggested by Janoff-Bulman (1979). Self-blame was described as an attempt to regain control but was also framed as maladaptive and harmful by all participants.

Reflexive comment

This study was interesting to analyse, as I hadn't recognised the dichotomies until I really started to explore the data. In the interviews, I had noticed the developing trend of professionals constructing the women as passive, vulnerable and helpless to victim blaming narratives in society – but I had not yet noticed the contradictions in the talk in which the women were then also constructed as resistant and difficult to influence. It made me rethink my own perceptions of victim blaming narratives and the way they are 'absorbed'. I realised I had used words like 'absorbed' and 'internalised' that positioned women as empty receptacles of beliefs and ideas without any interrogation or thought. This triggered a consideration as to whether I had also assumed that women and girls were passively absorbing victim blaming messages from an abstract concept ('society') without giving them (myself included) any credit for their own arguments and dilemmas. I have lectured and written articles

in which I have described women and girls as passively absorbing beliefs from society, which runs the risk of oversimplifying complex processes and ignores the agency of the people at the heart of matter.

The discussion with participants about how they were trying to deconstruct and challenge victim blaming and self-blame in their roles with women was also of interest to me as I had a genuine curiosity about how others were doing this – and ultimately – whether they thought it was working. Whilst it didn't surprise me that professionals didn't think they were having much effect on self-blame and victim blaming, I was surprised that I felt a little hopeless after analysing the data and writing up this chapter. It left me with a feeling of not knowing how to help women with feelings of self-blame and the harm done to them by victim blaming, if current efforts were not viewed as effective.

Conclusion

Professionals working with women subjected to sexual violence constructed self-blame and victim blaming as complex and dichotomous, with many of the key themes being dilemmatic. Professionals constructed victim blaming and self-blame as coming primarily from rape myths and the family network, and positioned women as passively accepting these victim blaming beliefs from external sources as a process of accepting or absorbing others' perceptions of them, their blame and the sexual violence. However, much of the way professionals talked about women and blame was contradictory which appeared to have an effect on their practice with women who blamed themselves, resulting in professionals potentially viewing self-blame as impossible to change for some women.

Chapter 7: Discussion

This discussion chapter contains nine sections. The first section will explore the findings about language use in victim blaming and self-blame that have emerged from all three studies. The second section will discuss the learning from the literature review about the origins and mechanisms of victim blaming in society using the ecological systems model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979;1986). The third section examines the victim blaming of women by members of the general public and the findings from the BOWSVA study. In the fourth and fifth section, findings about victim blaming of women and self-blame of women are explored, respectively, from both the perspective of women themselves and the professionals who support them. In the seventh section, the relationship between rape myths, victim blaming and self-blame is examined in light of the new findings. The eighth section of this chapter discusses and reflects upon the methodological approach taken to this research, including its strengths and limitations. The ninth section completes the chapter by discussing the practical implications of the research and ideas for future directions.

The use of language to construct victim blaming and self-blame

Language was found to be central to victim blaming and self-blame throughout this thesis. In the literature reviewed, language use was found to have influenced or affected the methodology and findings in previous studies about sexual violence, victim blaming and self-blame. When studies used the word ‘rape’, responses from participants decreased, even if all participants had been raped (Donde et al., 2018). This was an important finding for the current research about victim blaming and self-blame of women subjected to sexual violence, because it meant that there were methodological problems to avoid, purely based on the selection of language in

interview questions, study descriptions and questionnaire items. It also confirms that the accepted language to describe forced sex: ‘rape’ and ‘assault’ or ‘abuse’ (Heath et al., 2011) still appear to affect research findings and their interpretation.

Similarly, the language that is used to describe blame was found to be both flawed and complex. Studies exploring victim blaming have included questions, items, interpretations and discussions that use ‘cause’, ‘blame’, ‘responsibility’ and ‘fault’ as synonyms (Anderson and Bissell, 2011; Sleath, 2011; Shaver and Drown, 1986). Throughout articles and study materials, the words are conflated or used interchangeably. This influenced the decision to deliberately only use the word ‘blame’ consistently to conduct all studies in this research, even if this word itself may have influenced findings. It would be useful to conduct a set of parallel studies or one study with parallel items that use the words ‘blame’, ‘cause’, ‘responsibility’ and ‘fault’ separately to explore whether attribution of blame in sexual violence changes based on the language used. This would also go some way to exploring how much language can influence socially desirable responding in studies about victim blaming in sexual violence, especially if participants prefer one word over another, or feel that they mean different things about women’s blame, fault, cause or responsibility for sexual violence perpetrated against her.

Similarly, in the quantitative chapter, language was shown to have an important impact on the way psychometric measurements of RMA and victim blaming are developed, conducted and interpreted. Researchers (e.g. Sleath, 2011; McMahon and Farmer, 2011) have previously critiqued RMA scales for item language and phrases, which led to the withdrawal of the RMAS and the evolution of the IRMAS, AMMSA, U-IRMAS and the BOWSVA presented in this thesis. An exploration of language is crucial if psychometric measures are to be valid and consistent, and so

the current research focused on the effect of language in item development and in the interpretation of statistical results. Results from the BOWSVA study suggest that the language used to construct the offence, the woman and the man in each item influenced victim blaming. The sexual offence was deliberately described in different ways across the items, to consider arguments about the impact of conflating or employing language that could impact the way participants responded (Heath et al., 2011; Shaver & Drown, 1986; Sleath, 2011). In some items, the sexual offence was described with overt language such as ‘rape’, ‘attack’, ‘force’, ‘assault’ and ‘abuse’ and when this occurred, the items grouped together, meaning that participants tended to answer the same way. These items did appear to result in some of the lowest levels of victim blaming of the women, possibly because violent descriptions of offences may conform to the classic rape (Williams, 1984).

Conversely, when more subtle language such as ‘touched’, ‘made to’, ‘had to’, ‘groped’ or ‘performed sex acts’ was used to describe sexual offences in the items, victim blaming increased. This finding had important implications for the qualitative studies and influenced the language used in interview questions and used during discussions with women and professionals. For example, at the beginning of each interview, the participant was read some information about what constituted sexual violence to ensure they were able to talk about all forms of sexual violence rather than just ‘rape’ or ‘sexual assault’ which have narrow socially accepted definitions (Heath et al., 2011).

Outside of this research, these results suggest that the way academics construct sexual offence types in scenarios, case studies, experiment stimuli and psychometric items will have a significant impact on the outcomes of the study. These findings are only part of the issues around language, as this observation was also found for the

way the woman was described and the words used to position the man committing the sexual offence. For example, when the woman was described as being sexually active, enjoying sex or being sexually liberal, victim blaming of the woman increased, which not only demonstrates the issues with language, but is also in line with Ringrose (2013), who argues that women are constructed in dichotomous terms when it comes to their sexuality.

In both qualitative chapters, critical discourse analysis focussed on the way language was used to construct victim blaming and self-blame of women subjected to sexual violence. Findings from the interviews with women and professionals suggested that analysis of the language use revealed nuanced, complex and contradictory ways women talk about themselves, victim blaming and self-blame and the way professionals talk about the women they support. Language was explored as a set of tools that enabled and/or inhibited both the women and the professionals to construct, position and discuss blame in sexual violence.

The present research has demonstrated how language is constructing, empowering, disempowering and positioning the issue of blame in sexual violence. A relativist, social constructionist approach to victim blaming and self-blame of women subjected to sexual violence prioritises the language and narratives, which has been done throughout this thesis. However, as the overall research approach in this thesis was critical realism, whilst the language was shown to be instrumental in the construction of understandings of victim blaming and self-blame, there is more to both issues than only language construction and employment. A critical realist approach to the issue of victim blaming of women in society proposes that whilst language is a tool to construct and seemingly maintain victim blaming and self-blame, these issues are not only socially constructed in language and have effects outside of language. The

act of blaming women for sexual violence, the discrimination they face, the lack of justice in the legal system, the way they are treated by family and friends, the way they are treated by social care and the health system all continue, whether we perceive it or experience it ourselves, or not.

Victim blaming in society

Drawing upon the ecological systems model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979;1986), the literature review explored findings and theories from new and existing studies about victim blaming and self-blame. Together, the literature review and the findings from the three studies presented here provide further evidence that victim blaming of women cannot be explained by a single-factor theory or model, and that victim blaming is not located in only one source or system. Whilst victim blaming has often been explained using theories such as BJW (Lerner, 1980), hostile sexism (Lee, Fiske, & Glick, 2010) or cognitive theories such as attribution theory (Shaver, 1970), the current research suggests that any one theory is unable to be able to effectively explain victim blaming of women in society.

Almost every factor included in the literature review was discussed by participants in the two qualitative studies and both groups of participants had considerable knowledge of the systems in society that were identified as encouraging, maintaining and reinforcing victim blaming of women. Women talked about the way the media portrayed them, the way the police treated them, the way the court system problematised them, the way their families blamed them, the way their religions led them to believe they were being punished by God, the way their cultures and communities shamed and silenced them, the way rape myths had made them second guess what had happened to them and the way sexist values made them

believe that their female bodies caused sexual violence. Women and professionals had a thorough understanding of the different levels and systems within society and were aware that victim blaming of women was present in many different forms of media at once.

All three studies offered insight into why we might blame women for sexual violence perpetrated against them. The quantitative study provided a seven-factor solution to victim blaming, which whilst in it's infancy, is more nuanced than the assumption that victim blaming is caused by RMA or BJW. The solution suggests a complex mix of misogyny, rape myths, gender role stereotypes, relationship norms, male entitlement to the female body and the rejection of women as an independent sexual being. When women were interviewed in the first qualitative study, they explained victim blaming of women from their own perspective – both as a woman who had been blamed for sexual violence and also as a woman who observes victim blaming of other women in her society and community. Women constructed victim blaming of them and other women as being behavioural and characterological in nature, often citing multiple rape myths. When professionals were asked the same question, they also cited the same myths for why they thought women were blamed for sexual violence.

For women and professionals, the rape myth still appears to have significant impact on them, despite both groups recognising that the beliefs are untrue and harmful to women. Both groups constructed these messages as coming from 'society'. The word 'society' was used by both groups to describe a large, influential force that was external to them. Whilst describing victim blaming, both women and professionals talked about society as if it was not connected to them or as if they were outside of it, but nonetheless impacted by it. They constructed society as misogynistic, victim-

blaming, violent, and judgemental; often including the media, members of the general public, religions, cultures, communities, authorities and institutions within the concept of 'society'.

Victim blaming in society has been theorised to be linked to, or caused by, a number of different factors or explanations (Sleath, 2011). The most commonly cited explanations for victim blaming of women include the BJW (Lerner, 1980), RMA (Burt, 1980; Payne et al., 1999), hostile sexism, gender role stereotypes and attribution bias theories (Shaver, 1970). Whilst studies have shown inconsistent connections between these theories and the victim blaming of women (Grubb and Turner, 2012; Sleath, 2011), there has been little research to qualitatively understand these beliefs and biases against women (Maier, 2013).

Existing theories of victim blaming provide some clues about underlying mechanisms and motivations. Lerner (1980) theorised that BJW came from a need for control, personal safety and a belief in fairness and justice in an unsafe and uncertain environment. Burt (1980) and Brownmiller (1975) argued from a feminist perspective that victim blaming comes from a place of misogyny and hostile sexism, thereby suggesting that there is a hierarchy they identified as the patriarchy. Theories of attribution bias and defensive attribution from cognitive psychology (Shaver, 1970; Mason et al., 2004) theorise that victim blaming is caused by faulty logic and cognitive biases in the brain of the individual which affect the information processing of causality. Researchers have also argued that victim blaming is related to individualism and self-preservation, in which the underlying motivation is to convince the self that they are safe and able to control their environment (Anderson, 2001; Kalra & Bhugra, 2013). Finally, much has been written about the way women are constructed and perceived based on religious and cultural norms all over the world

(Franiuk & Shain, 2011; Heggen, 1996; Khuankaew, 2007; Turrell & Thomas, 2008). Religion also has strong links with Lerner's BJW (1980), which theorises that there is a universal, cosmic force that can balance the justice in the world. In most major world religions, this takes the form of a God or concepts of reward and punishment such as judgement day, heaven and hell. However, in Hinduism and Buddhism this takes the form of karma, a cosmic force that causes consequences for one's actions to influence the good and bad things that happen to people in their current, previous and next lives (Franiuk & Shain, 2011; Khuankaew, 2007). In addition to the links to blame, cause and justice, there was evidence in the literature that religion and cultural norms communicated and reinforced sexism and misogyny (Franiuk & Shain, 2011; Turrell & Thomas, 2008; Weaver, 2007). This overview of the explanations, theories and factors contributing to victim blaming of women suggests that one singular explanation, or even the culmination of a number of key theories is still unlikely to fully explain why others blame women for sexual violence perpetrated against them – and how and why this transfers to women as beliefs about self-blame.

Having examined the evidence from the existing literature and the findings from the new studies presented here, Figure 5 a below is presented to illustrate just how complex a solution to explaining the victim blaming of women subjected to sexual violence could be. The model is based on all the literature evidence examined as part of this thesis, the findings from the quantitative study and the findings from the two qualitative studies.

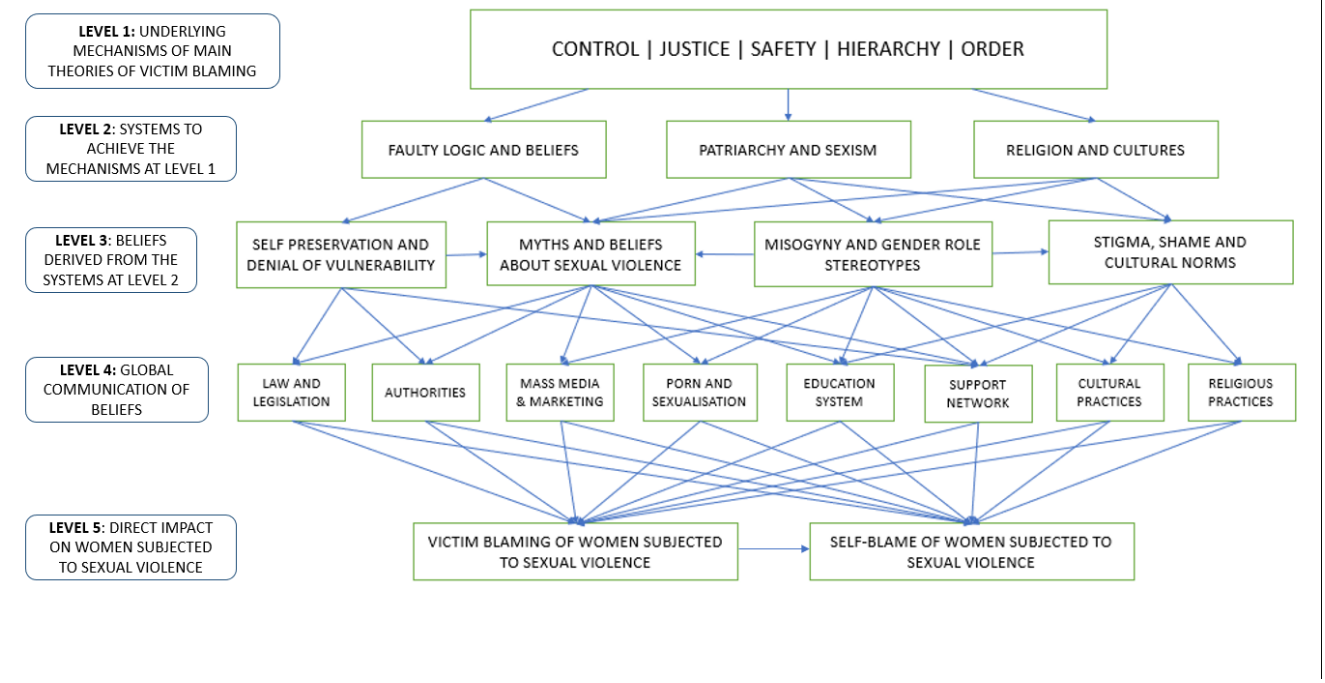

Figure 5: Proposing an integrated framework of victim blaming of women subjected to sexual violence

The framework presents five levels of factors that contribute to the victim blaming and self-blame of women subjected to sexual violence. Inspired by the ecological systems model by Bronfenbrenner (1979;1986), this diagram proposes an integrated explanation of the motivations, systems, beliefs and methods of communication that lead to women being blamed and blaming themselves for sexual violence.

At level 1, the underlying mechanisms for victim blaming are broad concepts underpinning the key theories of victim blaming, and represent qualities that humans seek from the world. Victim blaming is not specific only to sexual violence, and therefore there must be higher-order mechanisms that underpin the need to blame the victim of a distressing event. Existing literature and theories propose that people blame the victim because they are seeking control, safety, justice, order and hierarchy in the world (Lerner, 1980; Montada & Lerner, 1998). This level is the only

level that is not specific to victim blaming of women in sexual violence but appears to be common to much of the literature around blame, attribution and justice.

At level 2, the model presents three main systems that support the five key mechanisms. These mechanisms are human-made. They are belief systems, values, norms, hierarchies, control strategies and approaches to reasoning that help people to feel that they have achieved safety, control, justice, order and hierarchy in their lives and in their communities. All main theories of victim blaming of women subjected to sexual violence can fit into the three systems, some fit into multiple categories at once. Faulty logic and beliefs can relate to attribution errors, BJW, RMA and individualism. Patriarchy and sexism contribute to RMA, misogynistic values about women, rape-supportive beliefs, the sexualisation of women and girls as objects and gender role stereotypes used to blame women (Brownmiller, 1975; Burt, 1980). It is argued that religions and cultures were developed to maintain order, hierarchy, justice, control and feelings of safety, and therefore contribute to theories of BJW, cultural norms about women, relationships and sexual activity, religious beliefs about women, sex, abuse, gender roles and justice (Lerner, 1980; Turrell & Thomas, 2008). All these resulting beliefs are presented at level 3. Level 3 therefore presents the culmination of all the harmful beliefs that appear to contribute to the victim blaming of women subjected to sexual violence.

Level 4 presents the methods of global communication of the beliefs from level 3, based on the existing and current research. This level proposes that beliefs are communicated through a wide range of mediums, networks and authorities. Level 4 therefore illustrates the many angles from which women and the people around them receive harmful messages about women who are subjected to sexual violence, leading to level 5: the victim blaming of women and/or the self-blame of women.

Level 5 presents victim blaming and self-blame as parallel outcomes from the same systems, but links victim blaming to self-blame, due to the evidence that suggests that women who are blamed for sexual violence are likely to blame themselves (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004; Ullman, 2010). However, the current research did not support a reciprocal arrow back between self-blame and victim blaming, as whilst all of the women who took part in this research did blame themselves for sexual violence, none of them blamed other women for being subjected to sexual violence. Whilst experiencing victim blaming is related to feeling self-blame for sexual violence, it cannot be said that experiencing self-blame is related to victim blaming other women subjected to sexual violence.

The connections between and within the levels on the model are multiple and overlapping. Systems to achieve the five factors at level 1 influence many beliefs that contribute to victim blaming of women. Those beliefs are then communicated via a wide range of sources, which was evidenced in the two qualitative studies. Therefore, women are likely to experience victim blaming narratives and repertoires from multiple sources throughout the lifespan, whether or not they are subjected to sexual violence themselves. For the general public, this also means a lifetime of harmful victim blaming messages that become part of the interpretative repertoire about women's position in sexual violence and in the world. The multiple and overlapping connections between the systems, beliefs and communication methods means that challenging victim blaming of women cannot be achieved by siloed, single-explanation approaches such as challenging hostile sexism or educating people about rape myths. The overlapping and interconnected nature of the factors contributing to the victim blaming of women presented in this model may also go some way to explaining why findings from studies relying on psychometric

measurement of RMA, hostile sexism and BJW to draw conclusions about victim blaming have become inconsistent over the years (Sleath, 2011). The cause of victim blaming is multi-faceted and interlinked therefore the solutions to or approaches to understanding victim blaming of women in society must be multi-faceted, interlinked and consider the historical, cultural and hierarchical situatedness of victim blaming of women.

Findings about victim blaming of women

This section will discuss new findings about the victim blaming of women from all three empirical studies, and how evidence from each chapter supports the findings from others.

The first empirical chapter presented a new seven-factor solution to victim blaming of women: (1) She was asking for it, (2) She was in a dangerous situation, (3) She should have been more assertive, (4) He was entitled to her body, (5) The non-stereotypical sex offender, (6) The stereotypical rape myth and (7) She was a sexually active woman.

'She was asking for it' was one of the subscales and contained items that resulted in some of the highest levels of victim blaming. It positively correlated with the U-IRMAS and positively correlated with the 'she asked for it' subscale of the U-IRMAS. This form of victim blaming is common in the literature, with much written about this from a feminist perspective (Burt, 1980; Brownmiller, 1975). The concept of women 'asking for it' positions women as wanting to be raped, enjoying sexual violence or at the very least, doing something that leads to being sexually attacked. It was no surprise that this came out in the principle components analysis for the BOWSVA, but it does solidify an explanation of victim blaming of women that argues that the

general public do endorse attitudes towards women that suggest they believe that women can do or say things that ‘ask for it’. This is now the fourth psychometric measure that has contained a set of items that relate to the woman wanting it or asking for sexual violence (Gerger et al., 2007; McMahon and Farmer, 2011; Lonsway et al., 1999). This positioning of women as ‘asking to be raped’ also has strong links to pornography (Dines, 2011; Long, 2012).

‘She was in a dangerous situation’ subscale positioned all the women as being violently or forcibly assaulted in dangerous or risky situations, using overt language about the offence. This means that it is likely that this subscale needs further exploration, as it could have been the use of overt language such as ‘violent’, ‘raped’, ‘forced’, ‘pushed’ and ‘attacked’ that led to participants reducing the blame of the women in the items, or it could have been the description of the situations as dangerous or risky. Equally, the use of such overt language could have communicated to the participants that the situation was dangerous and volatile and therefore they may not have expected her to be able to do anything differently to protect herself or stop the sexual violence. Previous evidence suggested that participants would blame a woman more if she was described as being in a dangerous or risky situation, but the new findings contradict previous work (Miller et al., 2010).

‘She should have been more assertive’ resulted in some of the highest victim blaming of the woman in the items.. This subscale presented items that were not only worded in more subtle language but positioned women as unable to stop, escape or challenge the perpetrator of the offence. This appears to elicit increased victim blaming from participants. This could be related to the concept of sexual refusal assertiveness in which some researchers and theorists argued that women

could avoid sexual violence if they were more assertive in the way they tried to avoid or refuse unwanted sexual advances (Greene & Navarro, 1998). However, the assertion that women are not assertive enough or did not try hard enough to stop the sexual violence is a form of victim blaming, as it places blame on the woman to stop an offender, whilst not expecting the offender to stop themselves, or to never attack women in the first place. It is possible that this subscale could relate to rape myths and stereotypes that women who do not fight off an offender secretly want to be assaulted or raped or even enjoy sexual violence. Despite recent research arguing that the majority of sexual violence victims freeze during and assault and are very unlikely to try to fight or escape (Moller et al., 2017; Moor et al., 2013), participants were more likely to blame women for sexual violence when they perceived them to be not assertive enough. Further to this, it was concerning to see that this subscale resulted in the lowest blame of the man committing the sexual offence, with only 25.8% of participants blaming the man overall. This may have links to previous feminist work on token resistance, in which authors have argued that women are expected to engage in resistance to all sexual contact so as not to appear easy, but that due to their resistance being perceived as tokenistic, men were likely to ignore any kind of resistance from women they were sexually pursuing (Frese et al., 2004; Garcia, 1998).

‘He was entitled to her body’ was a small set of items that appeared to present scenarios in which men were ‘taking sex’ from very ill, sleeping or non-consenting women. All men in these scenarios were husbands or boyfriends and had continued or initiated sexual contact with the woman when she was not physically able to consent or had withdrawn her consent. None of the items were described as violent offences, but the woman was clearly positioned as ill, asleep or not aroused enough

to have sex. Due to the presence in the items of both the relationship with the woman, and the fact that the men were described as sexually assaulting or raping the women whilst they were asleep or after withdrawing consent, this raises questions about whether victim blaming increases when the woman is seen as property of the man, or the man is perceived as entitled to sex with his female partner because they are in a long term relationship. There is also the possibility that a general public sample did not have an adequate understanding of consent or thought that their partners having sex with them whilst they were asleep or even if they were not sexually aroused, was normal or doesn't count as sexual violence (Donde et al., 2018). Further research on this specific topic would be useful.

'He was a non-stereotypical offender' was a component that grouped together items that described a male offender who was deliberately positioned as vulnerable or non-stereotypical. This meant describing him as handsome, friendly, troubled or seeking support before or during the offence. These items did not result in high levels of victim blaming and so further exploration was needed. After closer analysis, it appears that the language in the items may have influenced the way participants responded. Whilst the man was positioned as non-stereotypical, all offences were still described as rapes, attacks and assaults. Therefore, it could be that the emotive language used to describe the offence was more of a cue to blame than the personal descriptions of the man himself. Another possible explanation could be that the general public are less susceptible to non-stereotypical descriptions of offenders, and are more focussed on what the offender did, especially if it was violent or overt. If this is correct, it would be useful to explore whether scenarios of sexual violence in which the man was non-stereotypical and the offence was not described as overtly

violent (avoiding emotive words such a raped, attacked, assaulted, forced) would result in higher blaming of the woman.

‘The stereotypical rape myth’ was a set of items that grouped together in the component analysis that resulted in very low blaming of the woman.. This subscale positively correlated with U-IRMAS overall, although only moderately. Analysis of the items showed them to be conforming with the classic rape stereotype described by Williams (1984), which may explain why these particular items produced these results. Previous research has shown that when rape events conform to the classic rape stereotype, women are less likely to be blamed, more likely to be believed, more likely to be seen as credible and less likely to blame themselves (Campbell, 2005, 2006; Campbell & Raja, 2005; Fisher et al., 2003). This finding confirms that there is still a set of sexual offences and a set of norms that a general public sample deemed to be ‘real’, which resulted in very low blame towards the woman.

‘She was a sexually active woman’ was the final component presented in the pattern matrix and resulted in the second highest levels of blame of the woman.. All items positioned the woman as sexualised, enjoying sex or having frequent sex, which resulted in over 63% of participants assigning blame to the woman in this subscale. These findings relate to a myriad of previous research including findings that have suggested that women are constantly walking a tightrope of being either considered a slut or frigid (Ringrose, 2013); in a dichotomous and contradictory role in which women are expected to be sexy and attractive, but not to engage in sex, otherwise they risk being perceived as easy (Garcia, 1998). This finding was also supported by the later qualitative study with women, who recognised that their sexual activity or sexual relationships were used to blame them for sexual violence.

Women and men were reasonably equally represented in the BOWSVA study sample and statistical analysis showed that there were no significant differences in the way men and women blamed women subjected to sexual violence. The same conclusion was drawn, even when subscales were explored separately. This is in line with previous research that did not find a difference in victim blaming between the sex of participants (e.g., Sleath, 2011).

The data from the general public samples was abnormally distributed, which was anticipated. The topic is sensitive and the responses from participants would have been affected by socially desirable responding. However, despite these issues, many items resulted in anywhere between a quarter and a half of participants blaming the woman for sexual violence perpetrated against her, even when they had also assigned full blame to the man who was described as committing the offence. As all items were descriptions of sexual offences that had been validated by experts in sexual violence, the ideal answers to every item would be that none of the women were to blame and all the men were to blame for choosing to commit a sexual offence against a non-consenting woman. However, as shown in chapter 4, none of the subscales or items resulted in the woman being assigned zero blame and none of the subscales or items resulted in the man being assigned full blame for the offence. This means that, even with socially desirable responding and the central tendency in the data suggesting that the average response did not blame the woman, this disguised the large number of participants who did assign blame to the woman on each item.

This study also asked participants how much they blamed the man in each scenario, as an additional way of using the BOWSVA measure. The findings were complex and would benefit from much further analysis and an additional literature review of

the act of blaming perpetrators of sexual violence against women, before any conclusions are drawn from the data. The analysis of this secondary part of the data will continue but was not included in the thesis, as the thesis focussed on the blaming of women subjected to sexual violence rather than the blaming of perpetrators, as written about by Sleath (2011).

Relationships between quantitative and qualitative study findings

Women and professionals in the interviews talked about every component that was suggested in the BOWSVA, but more importantly, they added depth and nuance to concepts of victim blaming and self-blame that have been discussed in the literature or have mainly been tested using questionnaires (Maier, 2013).

Related to the findings from the quantitative chapter, in the interviews women discussed their awareness of measuring themselves up to rape myth and beliefs about victim blaming that they had learned from all levels of the ecological systems. Participants were very aware of the stereotype of the victim they were expected to be and constructed their experiences as being in a victimhood hierarchy, in which some women and some rapes or sexual assaults were at the top, taken seriously and seen as a violent act against a woman – and some women and some rapes or assaults were dismissed or completely ignored. Women talked about feeling lucky or grateful if their rape or sexual assault fitted the accepted norm of the ‘classic rape’ and talked about feeling hopeless or uncertain if they knew that they, as a woman, or their experience did not fit the strict criteria of a ‘real rape’. However, the hierarchy went further than a concept of a ‘real rape’, and included all forms of sexual violence, the woman herself and the perpetrator. One woman talked about feeling as though her rape was ‘as good as its gonna get’ in terms of the way the police and her family

were going to perceive what happened to her, because she was attacked by a stranger in a street with multiple witnesses. These discussions bear significant similarity to the work of Christie (1986) who theorised the 'ideal victim'. However, the 'ideal victim' notion was general to all crime.

The discussions with women and professionals, in conjunction with the existing literature about hierarchies of victimhood and victim blaming led to the development of the model shown in Figure 6.

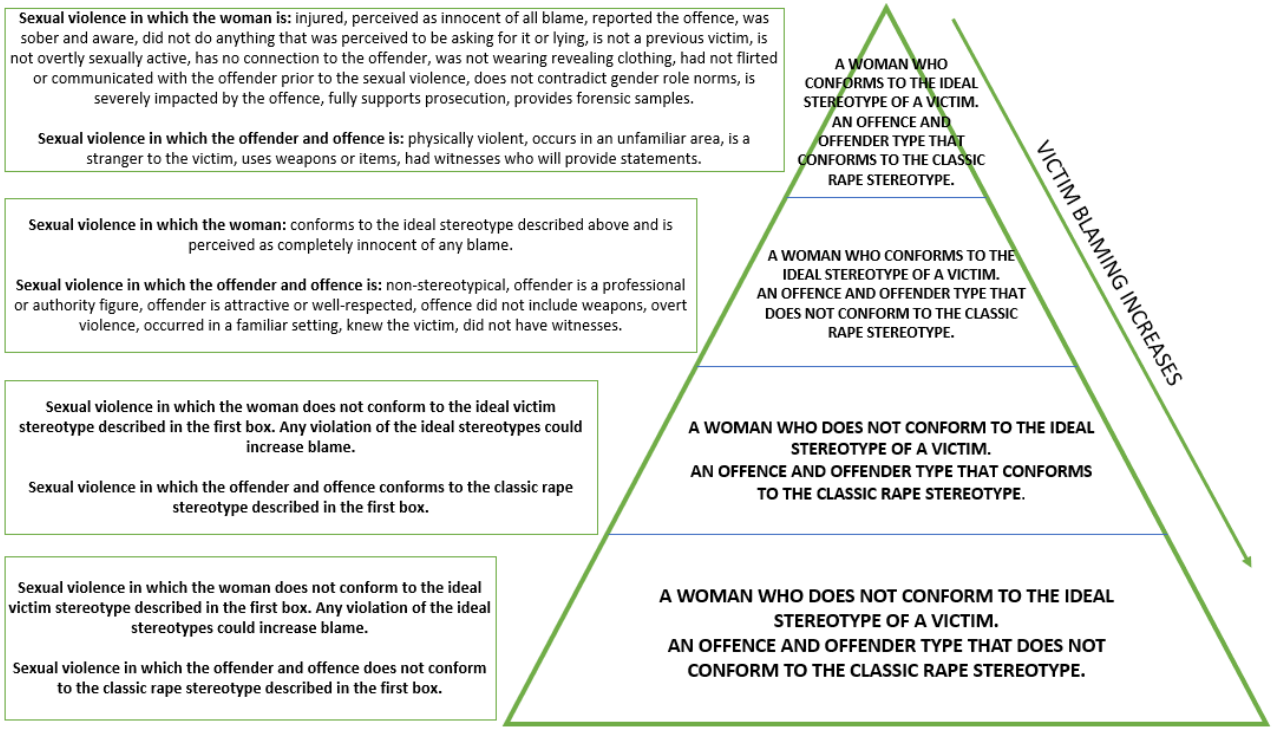

Figure 6: Victim Blaming of Women Hierarchy Triangle

From interviews with women and professionals, victim blaming of women does appear to be based on salient factors about the woman, the offence and the offender (this is in addition to the larger cultural, societal, cognitive and religious norms, values, beliefs and attitudes discussed in the integrated model of victim blaming of women). It could be argued that this hierarchy of victimhood is based on the minutiae

known only to those with full details of what happened; possibly the police, local authorities, health professionals or the close support network.

It appeared that participants felt that they were measuring themselves against an invisible set of standards that they must conform to, that the offence and the offender must conform to, if they hoped to be taken seriously or supported. Women were aware of what would happen if they did not conform to all required criteria and used this knowledge to make decisions as to whether they would report to the police or tell family and friends. This echoes findings from Kahn et al. (1994) and Ryan, (1988) who found that women would measure their experiences against the classic rape before making a decision to report to police; with women rarely reporting to police if they felt the rape did not conform and there was a chance they would be blamed.

Once women had been blamed for sexual violence, professionals found that challenging or reducing belief in victim blaming and rape myths was difficult to achieve. Professionals constructed the challenge of beliefs about victim blaming and self-blame as futile in some cases. Professionals constructed their own work as difficult and dilemmatic; often employing two competing discourses that women needed to know they were not to blame for sexual violence and that even when they tell women they are not to blame, it would not reduce her feelings of blame or her experiences of being blamed. This appeared to result in professionals who positioned themselves as less powerful than the other discourses in society that were blaming the woman for sexual violence.

This feeling of not being able to deconstruct victim blaming and self-blame resulted in talk that positioned women as too traumatised to be helped. This was a common interpretative repertoire and subject position, in which professionals explained that if

the women could not challenge victim blaming or challenge their own self-blame, they must have been harmed in childhood. This was an unexpected finding, as none of the professionals discussed evidence for this but constructed women who were struggling to challenge victim blaming as vulnerable and assumed that they must have significant childhood traumas that have led them to be unable to challenge victim blaming narratives. This positioning of the women could be presented as a form of victim blaming, in which professionals are blaming the women's inability to challenge difficult and harmful narratives about sexual violence on their assumed trauma histories. However, there is evidence in the literature that would suggest that women who were abused in childhood are more likely to blame themselves and be subjected to revictimisation following sexual violence (Ullman & Vasquez, 2015). Therefore, this point needs further exploration as to whether professionals are assuming that the women were abused in childhood, whether they have been taught that women who struggle with narratives about victim blaming have childhood traumas or whether this interpretative repertoire about women is coming from a collective feeling of powerlessness within the professionals.

Women experienced significant victim blaming from their family or close support network, and professionals told stories of women they supported who had been blamed by their families, friends or partners. However, it was the dilemmatic talk that was of most interest, in which both women and professionals talked about family as being the most important source of support, the first people they turned to with an expectation they would be unconditionally supportive and understanding. Whilst professionals did this much more often than women, families were constructed as the first port of call and the safety net for the woman. Simultaneously, the family were constructed as the most harmful, judgemental, isolating and intimidating

response women could get. Both women and professionals talked about families isolating, disbelieving, ridiculing, blaming, shaming, attacking and silencing women when they disclosed sexual violence. Despite this, the two discourses about the family were deployed concurrently, in which women and professionals recognised that the family was likely to blame the women, but that the family was still the first group of people they would go to after sexual violence (Ullman, 1996;1999; White & Rollins, 1981).

Findings about self-blame of women

Discussions of victim blaming and self-blame were closely intertwined, but some important findings come from the way professionals and women constructed self-blame in their talk. Self-blame was almost always presented in the talk as an ideological dilemma between two competing narratives.

The first key finding was about the way women adapt or take on victim blaming narratives as their own self-blame. Previous literature has not clearly explained how women might begin to blame themselves for sexual violence (Anderson, 1999) but the language used in previous studies tends to construct women as passively absorbing blame beliefs from society, their close support network and the media. However, there were clear differences between the way women and professionals constructed self-blame after sexual violence. Whilst women discussed self-blame in complex, dilemmatic, challenging language, professionals discussed women as passively absorbing self-blame beliefs without any interrogation or challenge. Words such as ‘absorb’, ‘take on’, ‘accept’ and ‘adopt’, served to construct women as passive and powerless to accepting self-blame after sexual violence. This positioned women as simplistic in their thinking about themselves, the sexual violence and

blame; in which they would take on the beliefs of anyone who blamed them and accept them into their own narrative without hesitation.

However, when contrasted with the way women constructed their feelings of self-blame, the studies revealed a difference. Whilst professionals constructed women as passive absorbers of new beliefs about blame, women constructed themselves as challenging, interrogating, confused, inquisitive and constantly unsure of their self-blame. Women frequently described a feeling of ‘over-analysis’ or ‘over-thinking’ in which they would replay the events in their minds whilst questioning or blaming everything they did or said. However, this was not the end of the process for them. All women discussed a feeling of knowing they were not to blame for any of the sexual violence; having a counternarrative that they could not possibly be to blame and that the perpetrator of the offence chose to hurt them. They talked about moving back and forth between blaming themselves and blaming the perpetrator – often resulting in both.

To add to this feeling of unease and challenge, women also talked about a difference between logically knowing they were not to blame and feeling to blame. This difference inspired the title of the thesis, because every woman and almost every professional said those words during interviews. Women described it as a deep feeling that they ‘knew’ they were not to blame for any sexual violence (from a place of logic, reasoning and knowledge), but that they still ‘felt’ to blame (from a place of emotion or deeper). This was reiterated by professionals who said that they could change the knowledge of the woman so that she understood that she was not to blame for sexual violence, but they felt it was very difficult for her to truly ‘feel’ she was not to blame.

Clearly, this discourse is different from the one that constructs women as passively accepting victim blaming, leading to self-blame. Women were fighting the narratives, challenging them and holding them at the same time as beliefs that they were not to blame at all. This positions women as having more agency and power than the narrative that constructs women as a passive sponge that absorbs everyone else's beliefs about herself.

Interestingly, professionals constructed women in a dilemmatic way when it came to helping them with self-blame beliefs, too. As already discussed, professionals positioned women as passive absorbers of new narratives and beliefs about victim blaming and self-blame, but when professionals were asked about how they helped women to understand that they were not to blame for sexual violence, they constructed the women as difficult to influence, difficult to change their beliefs and very resistant. Therefore, professionals presented two constructions of women as simultaneously passive to societal beliefs about self-blame and victim blaming – but challenging and difficult in the counselling room when the professional was attempting to give the woman a new, positive narrative about victim blaming and self-blame. This suggests that professionals position women as both easily accepting and staunchly rejecting new victim blaming and self-blame beliefs.

One explanation for this could be that this represents a stereotype of women who have been assaulted as being submissive and passive in the world, but this then leads to frustration when this submissive and passive woman does not take on the new beliefs about self-blame being given to them by the professional. Perhaps there is an expectation that a woman so easily influenced by victim blaming and self-blame can easily be influenced to reject those beliefs about blame. This is especially important because women did not construct themselves as passive or submissive to

victim blaming or self-blame beliefs and provided examples of them challenging or questioning blame. Some women also discussed how they didn't believe they were to blame for sexual violence at all until many people (support network, police, other professionals) had told them that they were to blame – and even then, they were able to construct the blame as being a feeling, not a belief. As such, it may be that professionals working in sexual violence position women as having no agency, no power to challenge and therefore become frustrated when those same women do not accept new narratives.

A second explanation for this dilemmatic talk could be that women are more likely to use negative, blaming discourses about women but find it more difficult to use or access positive, empowering, non-blaming narratives about women. Evidence from previous studies has found that when women experience victim blaming or other negative responses to their disclosure of sexual violence, this has a much bigger impact on the woman than if they were to receive positive and supportive responses to their disclosure (Ullman, 2010). If this finding was explored further, it may suggest that negative impacts on women may be more influential than positive impacts, therefore supporting the argument that a woman might be influenced or impacted more by victim blaming and self-blame than by a professional reassuring her that she is not to blame.

There could be a third explanation for the dilemmas about the two dichotomies: women as passive versus active and women as thinking versus feeling self-blame. It could be that women and professionals are constructing victim blaming and self-blame in their individual contexts and spaces, knowing that no matter how they construct or deconstruct victim blaming and self-blame, there is a larger, more powerful societal structure of victim blaming beliefs and millions of people who

endorse those beliefs. Professionals often constructed the process of helping a woman who blames herself for sexual violence as long, difficult and sometimes futile. They discussed how useful their weekly, singular narrative would be against a whole lifetime of messages, a support network, a legal system, the media and the larger societal misogynistic belief systems that continually position the woman as to blame for sexual violence.

The self is always constructed in a social context and women do not exist in a vacuum or silo (Gergen, 2011; Hood, 2012). Even when a woman constructs herself as not to blame for sexual violence, others are still able to construct her as to blame. Therefore, there could be a possibility that the dilemmas and dichotomies presented here are caused by the difference between the way the woman constructs herself and the way society continues to construct her, regardless of her own perspective (Hood, 2012). This could mean that even when women 'know' they are not to blame, they are still made to 'feel' to blame for sexual violence – and they remain aware that their own construction of themselves and what happens is different from the way others are constructing her and the sexual violence.

It is interesting to consider this explanation from the critical realist perspective, because this dilemma is precisely why a critical realist perspective argues that regardless of how an individual may perceive or construct an event, other systems and structures exist external to the mind of the individual perceiver (Bhaskar, 1975). Women could therefore construct themselves as being blameless for sexual violence, but this would not reduce their experience of societal victim blaming or the chances of discrimination, injustice or maltreatment when she discloses sexual violence.

This theme of dichotomy and dilemmatic talk continues into the final key finding about self-blame: that self-blame during and after sexual violence caused women to make significant changes to their lives in the name of ‘staying safe’, even when they knew, or learned that it wouldn’t or didn’t keep them safe. They constructed those changes as feeling necessary to protect themselves, but also useless or misguided. Women described changing their hair, appearance, jobs, hobbies, clothing, behaviour, attitudes, relationships, friendships and even their character or communication style to protect themselves.

This final finding is important because of how many campaigns about sexual violence encourage women to make changes to their lives, their actions, behaviours and decisions to avoid or protect themselves from sexual violence (e.g. London Metropolitan Police advised women to stop wearing headphones or looking at their phones when walking to avoid being raped (BBC, 2017)). Women said were aware of this and in most cases thought they followed that advice. Those who were not directly advised to change something about themselves did so following counterfactual thinking or the need for perceived control (Branscombe et al., 2003; Frazier, 1990; Miller et al., 2010;) in which they sought out what they thought had caused the sexual violence and then changed something so that it would not happen to them again. This also links to Janoff-Bulman’s work (1979) and Pat Frazier’s rebuttal (1990) who argued about the purpose and impact of self-blame and perceived past or future control over sexual violence. However, rather than women constructing these changes as adaptive and helpful, women constructed them as making them feel worse and affecting their mental health. Women reported that they tried to make changes to themselves and their lives but eventually realised that this hadn’t or wouldn’t protect them from sexual violence. This was especially true for the

women who were subjected to sexual violence again, even after they had made substantial changes to their appearance or lives. This realisation was profound and scary for most women, who had been led to believe that they could make simple changes that would protect them from a sex offender.

When women switched their narrative from changes being to protect herself to changes being useless or futile in protecting herself, they sometimes began to self-blame personal characteristics or internal reasons such as ‘being a bad person’ or ‘being punished by God’, which is supported by Janoff-Bulman (1979) and Lerner (1980). Women are frequently told to change their behaviour, attire, character, decisions and lifestyle to avoid sexual violence, which positions those factors as to blame for sexual violence. This can be explained by rape myths, by misogyny, by self-preservation theories (Furnham, 2003) or by individualism theories (Jago & Christenfield, 2018). But when women then make those changes and are still subjected to sexual violence, this contradicts the belief that women can stop sexual violence by changing themselves, resulting in a realisation that the change didn’t work. Women then shifted the blame to questioning their character or questioning whether there was some larger force at play; relating more to BJW as an explanation for self-blame (Janoff-Bulman, 1979; Lerner, 1980). The reality is that the changes women make do not influence or change the actions, motivations or histories of the sex offender, hence why sex offender theory has long focussed on the integrated factors that explain why and how sex offenders commit offences against victims, which do not include a list of things that a victim may have done wrong or could have done better (Beech & Ward, 2006).

Often the changes women are encouraged to make to avoid sexual violence only pertain to the classic rape. Women are often told not to walk home alone, not to go

anywhere alone after dark, not to wear headphones, not to drink in bars, not to meet men alone, not to go to certain areas and not to wear certain clothing. Whilst these changes are positioned as 'safety advice' for women, they do not protect women from the majority of sexual violence which occurs in a relationship with someone known to them (Sleath & Woodhams, 2014). In fact, these types of offences are the most likely to be seen as 'not a real victimisation' (Donde et al., 2018), as shown by the entitlement subscale in the BOWSVA. They also lead women to ask, 'what did I do wrong?' when they are subjected to sexual violence, leading to them making changes to themselves or their lives. This is even more confusing for women who know they did not contravene the 'rules' to stay safe from sexual violence, who then consider whether it is something internal about them that attracts sex offenders or abusive relationships. This level of self-blame is pervasive. All women and professionals talked about women either being directly told to change something about themselves or feeling as though they should – but women were the only group to construct these changes as useless.

The relationship between rape myth acceptance and victim blaming of women

Throughout the three studies, RMA played an important role. It was not the sole explanation for victim blaming by the general public, the victim blaming women and professionals discussed, or the self-blame that women experienced – but it did frequently feature as a connected concept across all three studies.

In the quantitative study, the BOWSVA items and subscales were shown to have positive relationships with the U-IRMAS items and subscales. People who assigned more blame to women subjected to sexual violence in the BOWSVA items were also likely to agree with the rape myths in the U-IRMAS items. The relationship was

moderate and needs further exploration as the BOWSVA is tested further. However, the items that were constructed to conform to the classic rape did result in the lowest victim blaming of women, which suggests that the classic rape and the rape myths that underpin it are still influential in the attribution of blame to women (McMahon and Farmer, 2011; Sleath, 2011; Williams, 1984).

In interviews with women, they were able to identify all of the most common rape myths with details and examples. Women both accepted and rejected rape myths in complicated talk in which they would measure themselves against rape myths and the classic rape, whilst also rejecting rape myths as 'just myths'. The most common rape myths used to measure themselves against were those that were about assertiveness and about their bodies or appearance. Women wrestled with whether they 'did enough' to escape, fight off or resist the offender and even though they all talked repeatedly about how many times they said 'no' or tried different strategies to stop the offence, they constructed themselves as lacking in confidence and unable to assert themselves. This is dilemmatic, as they would describe all the things they said and did to try to stop the offender but then chastise themselves for not being assertive enough. This is likely to be related to the rape myth that 'real' rape victims physically fight off an offender and means that women might position themselves as 'not assertive enough' because they didn't physically fight the offender (Donde et al., 2018; Moller et al., 2017).

The second most common rape myth that women employed to measure their experiences against seemed to be the misogynistic beliefs and myths about their bodies and their appearance. Women talked frequently in the interviews about what they were wearing or what their body shape, body size, bra size or clothing style was at the time they were subjected to sexual violence. They talked assertively about

their rejection of this myth and did not apply it to themselves; instead they gave counter examples about how they were wearing jeans and a jumper when they were attacked – or that their breast size was out of their control. One woman said that she used to think it was because she developed breasts earlier than her peers and her body was naturally curvaceous, but she caveated that statement with her rejection of the myth and argued that she could do nothing about the shape of her body in adolescence or adulthood. Even the women who had originally blamed themselves for sexual violence based on her body type or clothing, rejected this reasoning in the interviews and concluded that her body type or clothing could not have been to blame for sexual violence. This outcome contrasts with the other, in which women continued to wrestle with the rape myth that she was not assertive enough or should have fought off the offender better. With this rape myth, women rejected it and refused to blame themselves for their bodies or clothing. This suggests that RMA, victim blaming and self-blame may be connected but not causally – and the connection is likely to be more complicated than RMA simply leading to self-blame.

In interviews with professionals, they described themselves as constantly coming up against the power of the rape myth and the classic rape in their work with police and other professionals. They positioned rape myths as all encompassing, powerful forces that ‘infected’ society like a disease. Unlike the women, the professionals had ample experience of the rape myths being used to blame women in the court of law, in police investigations, in social care proceedings and in mental health settings. They positioned themselves as defenders or challengers of the rape myths in which they took other professionals to task over their belief or use of rape myths to blame women subjected to sexual violence.

Rape myths did play a role in the victim blaming and self-blame of women, but according to the findings from the current research it was not a linear or causal relationship, and the use of rape myths in victim blaming and self-blame varied considerably.

Points about methodology and approach

There are a number of strengths to this research that arise from methodological and philosophical approaches to the work. There are also some important limitations. This section will discuss strengths and limitations of the research presented in this thesis.

One of the first strengths of this work was the depth and size of the literature review that was carried out in the first year of the research. Exploring, reading and gaining an understanding from the existing literature which included over 200 academic journals, books, PhD theses, national and international reports undoubtedly had a positive effect on the strength of the work presented here. Drawing evidence from multiple disciplines and sources also meant that broader societal mechanisms and explanations could be considered or interrogated. The literature review has been condensed substantially for this thesis, but still included a detailed exploration of over 200 sources. The learning from the existing literature enabled a more nuanced and integrated understanding of victim blaming and self-blame of women, influenced the methods and materials and informed the interpretation of findings.

The critical realist approach to this research has facilitated a conjunction between realist and relativist philosophy, meaning that rather than constructing victim blaming and self-blame as wholly relative and socially constructed, it is possible to construct both issues as independent, impactful problems in the world that harm women –

whilst also exploring the way language constructs the beliefs and norms that influence and reinforce those harms. The work was informed by feminist standpoint theory and sought to centre the voices of women, and to learn from women's thoughts, experiences and position in the world.

This mixed-methods research also sought to explore the issues of victim blaming and self-blame from three different angles in order to inform the research and to consider different positions, as many of the studies in victim blaming have tended to rely on self-report questionnaires only. However, the methodological approach in this thesis has presented the amount of nuanced learning that can come from combining quantitative and qualitative research on one specific topic. This is especially true for how useful the discursive approach and focus on language has been, throughout the thesis. This focus improved the critique, development of the BOWSVA scale, influenced the wording of the interview questions and the analytic approach to the data. The discussion of language flows throughout the work as a tool to construct victim blaming and self-blame, whilst the critical realist element ensured that a focus on the real impact, harm and discrimination women was not lost in abstract discussions about language.

The methodology employed here sought to work alongside women and not to treat them just as sources of information or data. It is imperative that women subjected to sexual violence, who are consulted about issues that affect them, do not then experience silence from the researchers, or never find out what their thoughts were used for. Women were therefore consulted throughout the work and were offered the opportunity to comment on and interpret the data analysis and study findings, including further work coming from this thesis and their interviews. There was parallel activism and campaigning, as I did not conduct the research in a vacuum

and my personal activism with women and girls subjected to sexual violence continued throughout the three years of work. Due to this, research was communicated repeatedly at all stages, not only at professional conferences or with other academics but to the general public and to thousands of women subjected to sexual violence. The work presented in this thesis has already influenced the development of free resources for women and professionals working with women and will continue to do so.

The research aimed to be as authentic and transparent as possible. The quantitative data in the BOWSVA study has been presented thoroughly, including each item response, which is not consistently presented in other studies (Anthoine et al., 2014). Data was not heavily edited, transformed or changed to seek a desired outcome, with the only data cleaning undertaken being the deletion of non-complete responses that could not be analysed clearly. Outliers were not deleted as this would have ignored the real beliefs and responses of participants that did not 'fit' the norm, and abnormal distributions were not changed or improved to get better outcomes from the data. Instead, the data was explored using parametric and non-parametric approaches and conclusions were suggested tentatively. It is important to frame these approaches to the research as strengths, where they could be perceived as weaknesses.

All studies in this thesis have benefitted from thorough analysis with checking and re-checking of findings and interpretations with second coders, supervisors, alternative statistical tests and personal feedback from participants in all three studies.

Further strengths of this research include the decision to position myself as an active agent in the research – and not an objective psychologist. As a woman who was

subjected to sexual violence, as an activist and volunteer in feminist causes, as a professional working in the psychology of sexual abuse and violence towards women and girls and as a PhD researcher, I chose to adopt a highly reflective practice throughout the work – and to include critical reflexive comments at the end of each study and chapter – including the quantitative chapter in which we rarely see the use of critical reflexivity as this is perceived as a 'qualitative' concept. As discussed by Ortlipp (2008) and Bhaskar (1975), it is important to remain present and visible in the work that we do and to acknowledge our own experiences, upbringing, decisions, values, beliefs, assumptions and goals.

Finally, a key strength of this work is the potential for real world impact for women subjected to sexual violence and professionals working with those women affected. Victim blaming uniquely impacts women subjected to sexual violence and continues to be prevalent (Gravelin et al., 2019). Whilst quantitative studies exploring prevalence and attitudes have been plentiful over the years, research that explores the experiences of being blamed, blaming the self and how to help women to stop blaming themselves for sexual violence has been less so. This work addresses an important gap in the research and pulls together theories, factors, frameworks and new evidence to suggest more nuanced ways of understanding and explaining victim blaming of women.

Limitations of the work have been discussed within each chapter but will be discussed more broadly here. The quantitative study providing an account of the development and testing of the BOWSVA must be considered as an initial development study and not a full validation of the measure. The factor structure and findings from the study need further exploration with different samples to confirm or reject the solution presented here, and to build understanding of attribution of blame.

The data generated from the secondary scale in the BOWSVA which asked participants how much blame they assigned to the man in each scenario also needs further exploration before conclusions can be drawn, both about the blaming of perpetrators of sexual violence and the relationship this has with the blaming of their female victims described in the items.

The qualitative chapters utilised a critical discursive analysis approach to the data, which did yield important results, but the focus on language instead of experience may have been a limitation. The data from interviews could be analysed again using a complementary approach to focus on the experiences and feelings presented by participants (such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis), to explore additional experiential components less relevant to a Critical Discursive Analysis. Each study also had a small sample size which prevents generalisation of results. However, generalisation was not a goal sought after by this work. Further, where most participants were interviewed face-to-face, a small number chose to take part over the phone, which may have an impact on the findings due to the difference in environment or experience of taking part without a face-to-face context.

Implications for practice and research

The research presented here has several implications for practitioners working with women subjected to sexual violence and for broader campaigns and interventions to tackle victim blaming of women. First, this thesis presents victim blaming and self-blame as a battleground of beliefs in which women fight to understand, accept or reject common narratives in society, beliefs about themselves, myths about sexual violence, blame from support networks and the positioning of women in a sexist society. This means that future research and practice would benefit from adopting a

feminist standpoint and opting to see women as active and challenging in their experiences of victim blaming and self-blame, rather than positioning them as passively absorbing beliefs. Adopting this position in practice would mean working with women as active agents who have their own individual thoughts, feelings and power to exert regarding victim blaming and self-blame, as opposed to working with them as naïve victims who accept others' beliefs without question and need teaching or leading to a better understanding of self.

The findings from this research present victim blaming as multi-faceted with many origins and motivations, which could be useful for practitioners working directly with women subjected to victim blaming. Rather than potentially explaining victim blaming as being solely down to RMA or misogyny, it may be helpful for practitioners to understand the layers and interlinking factors that influence so many people to blame women for sexual violence perpetrated against them. Gaining this knowledge may improve awareness raising campaigns, training of professionals and support work with women which could become more holistic and contextual once all factors and theories of victim blaming were integrated. However, one possible negative consequence of realising how complex and multi-faceted victim blaming of women is, is that professionals could feel hopeless or powerless in their roles to reduce victim blaming and self-blame. As seen in chapter 6 feedback, this was a concern raised by two of the professionals who wrote to me. However, this does suggest that the professionals who read the chapter and gave feedback were also not aware of how multi-faceted and complex victim blaming was and gave them much to think about in their own approaches at work. This included one professional organisation which changed their training programme to include wider explanations of victim blaming after reading the draft chapter.

In terms of public influence, this research could also be used to influence the way the mass media, criminal justice system, education system and public awareness campaigns depict, position or describe sexual violence against women. With both professionals and women describing how the mass media and the criminal justice system were the most common authoritative sources of victim blaming of women, the findings here could be used to lobby both agencies to change the way they talk about women subjected to sexual violence. Public awareness campaigns could stop blaming the actions, decisions and appearance of women and focus more on the actions, decisions and motivations of perpetrators – and on the support provided by families and support networks. Therefore, national and regional campaigns and interventions focussing on the improvement of support and responses to women when they disclose could useful.

The research also has further implications for academic and social research. The focus on discourse in this thesis resulted in significant learning about the way language is used to describe or construct sexual violence, women, male perpetrators and blame can change the outcomes and interpretations of research materials, data and findings. Future research with the general public to explore attitudes towards sexual violence against women needs to carefully consider the words, phrases and power of interpretative repertoires surrounding blame, sexual violence, gender roles and social norms when developing and conducting studies.

This thesis also presents a more nuanced and complex view of victim blaming of women subjected to sexual violence, in which multiple mechanisms work together at different levels of society to reinforce and encourage victim blaming of women. As previous research has tended to focus on RMA, BJW or hostile sexism as the explanation of victim blaming of women, the findings in this thesis may influence

future theories or studies to look at this issue in a more integrated and holistic way, as opposed to looking for correlations with singular explanations or factors. The framework presented in Figure 5 may be a good starting point for researchers to explore relationships between the influences in society that appear to be contributing to, maintaining or communicating victim blaming messages to, and about, women subjected to sexual violence. One of the most under researched areas in the victim blaming literature seems to be the individualistic approach to responsibility and blame, in which women are told they are responsible for their own behaviours, experiences and safety – but the men who commit sex offences against them are not held responsible to the same extent. In a society in which individual responsibility and 'free choice' is championed, it is strange that women subjected to sexual violence should be seen as responsible and making choices that lead to sexual violence, but men committing sexual violence are seen as being 'led on' by women – especially as this would mean he had no responsibility and no free choice.

Second, it would be useful to perform more exploratory, qualitative studies about BJW in sexual violence against women. Whilst quantitative studies have shown inconsistent results, language use containing concepts from BJW are still commonly used in every day speech (karma will get you in the end, what goes around comes around, you get what you deserve, good things happen to good people). This may mean that when directly asked, participants of questionnaires do not endorse BJW items but do use these discourses and interpretative repertoires in discussion about women subjected to sexual violence.

Future research and campaigns building on this thesis

Planned research and campaigns building on the learning from this thesis include the further exploration and validation of the BOWSVA scale. The development and testing of peer reviewed resources for professionals, free resources for women to understand victim blaming and feelings of self-blame, a large dissemination event for professionals, free videos and blogs discussing the findings and a book which will be published in 2020. Further to this, the research has suggested several possibilities for future research into the implication of language in victim blaming and self-blame of women. Practice research also needs to be conducted to explore the process of coming to accept victim blaming as a belief about self, challenging that self-blame and then rejecting the belief. At present, the explanations of victim blaming, and self-blame do not suitably explain how this process occurs or how practitioners and support network members can help women to challenge victim blaming from others, or self-blame beliefs they hold about the sexual violence they were subjected to.

Concluding remarks

This mixed-methods research has revealed new, more nuanced insights into the victim blaming and self-blame of women subjected to sexual violence. The research has the potential to generate much more research and has already had impact, contributing to new, free resources, handbooks and media for women blamed for sexual violence perpetrated against them.

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Appendix List

Appendix 1

Literature Search

An initial literature search was conducted on the 10th January 2016 using the PsycINFO database to find an answer to the research question concerning what is currently known about the relationship between victim blaming, self-blame of women subjected to sexual violence. To develop a general overview and theoretical underpinning of the topic, firstly the University library catalogue was searched for books with relevance to the topic. The databases PsycInfo, Science Direct and SAGE were searched for peer reviewed articles, books and book chapters using combinations of all of the key words 'rape', 'blame', 'victim', 'revictimisation', 'victim blaming', 'self-blame' which provided 2488 results. The databases were searched for specific papers on the relevant theories using keywords 'victim blaming' and 'self-blame' in addition to each one of these words: 'just world', 'attribution bias', 'defensive attribution hypothesis' and 'rape myths' and specific issues: 'sexism', 'objectification', 'individualism', 'porn culture', 'ecological model' and 'religion'.

All abstracts were read to ascertain relevance to the victim blaming or self-blame of women subjected to sexual violence. Abstracts that were not relevant to the current research were excluded. Studies that focussed on the victim blaming or self-blame of men or children were excluded. In the initial search, this produced in 123 relevant results. This process was repeated several times throughout the period of research with searches looking for recently published articles, books and book chapters conducted with the same keywords and rules on the 11th October 2016 (resulting in a further 55 articles), 9th August 2017 (resulting in a further 38 articles) and the 5th January 2018 (resulting in 6 PhD theses and 25 articles). In total, this literature review included learning from 247 peer reviewed sources.

Appendix 2

Ethical approval confirmation for quantitative study

03/02/2017

Dear Jessica

Re: "Exploring the effect of victim blaming on the self-blame and revictimisation of women who have experienced rape and sexual assault: Development of a new psychometric measure of victim blaming"

Application for Ethical Review ERN_16-1380

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project, which was reviewed by the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Ethical Review Committee.

On behalf of the Committee, I confirm that this study now has full ethical approval.

I would like to remind you that any substantive changes to the nature of the study as described in the Application for Ethical Review, and/or any adverse events occurring during the study should be promptly bought to the Committee's attention by the Principal Investigator and may necessitate further ethical review.

Please also ensure that the relevant requirements within the University's Code of Practice for Research and the information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages (available at https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Links-and-Resources.aspx) are adhered to and referred to in any future applications for ethical review. It is now a requirement on the revised application form (https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-Forms.aspx) to confirm that this guidance has been consulted and is understood, and that it has been taken into account when completing your application for ethical review.

Please be aware that whilst Health and Safety (H&S) issues may be considered during the ethical review process, you are still required to follow the University's guidance on H&S and to ensure that H&S risk assessments have been carried out as appropriate. For further information about this, please contact your School H&S representative or the University's H&S Unit at healthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

Kind regards

Susan Cottam
Research Ethics Officer
Research Support Group
C Block Dome
Aston Webb Building
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston B15 2TT

Appendix 3

Study 1: Online Questionnaire, information sheet and debrief

- You have been invited to take part in a study which aims to test a new way to measure how people perceive various kinds of sexual offences against women. Whilst sexual violence can happen to anyone, this study is focussing on sexual offences committed by men towards women. Other studies have looked at offences committed by women and men towards women and men.
-
- The study involves the completion of an anonymous, multiple choice survey which is an online version of the new measure. The new measure gives scenarios of sexual offences occurring and asks for your thoughts about blame. The answers given by you and other participants will be used to explore how effective (how reliable and how valid) the measure could be when used to measure how people perceive different kinds of sexual offences against women.
-
- The results from this study will be used in the PhD Psychology thesis of Jessica Eaton of the University of Birmingham and may therefore be published in other journals, presentations and spoken about at conferences.
-
- To take part, you must be aged 18 years or over, have a good level of English literacy (but this does not need to be your first language) and have access to a computer with the internet.
-
- If you would like to take part in this study, you will not be asked for any identifying information and your answers will remain confidential. The survey will take around twenty minutes to complete.
-
- It is important that you understand your rights before you undertake this participation, so please do read the full information sheet below:
-
- Your participation is entirely voluntary which means that you can choose not to participate, you can withdraw from this study part way through simply by closing your browser window or you can contact the researcher to have your answers removed from the study even after you have submitted them.
-
- You will not be asked any information that would enable you to be identified, however you will be asked questions about your age, ethnicity, religion, occupation and gender just so the researcher can be confident that the answers represented as many different people as possible. In order to remain anonymous but to enable your withdrawal from this study, you will be asked to generate a code using random information. This code will enable the researcher to remove your answers if needed without asking you any other details.
-
- Once the answers from this study have been analysed and reported, it will not be possible to remove your answers so if you do change your mind and would like to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher before 21st April 2017.
-
- At the end of this study, you have the option to enter your email address into a prize draw to win one of ten £10 Amazon Vouchers. Your email address will be stored anonymously and securely away from your questionnaire responses to maintain the highest level of anonymity and confidentiality. Entering into the prize draw is entirely optional.
-
- Taking part in this study means reading and thinking about potentially distressing and sensitive information relating to sexual offences committed against women. Please take care of yourself by making a decision as to whether you would like to take part and also seeking further support if you find that you need to talk to someone about any of the issues raised in this study. There is a list of support agencies at the end of this information sheet.
-
- You are welcome to request the results of this study and to read the final report when it is completed. If you would like to do so, please contact the researchers at JEE509@bham.ac.uk or [redacted] – however, please be aware that if your email address contains your full name or your place of work, this would affect your anonymity.
-
- Before, during or after your participation, you are welcome to contact the researcher or the supervisor of the researcher for further information or to ask questions about this study, the data and the publication.

-
- Doctoral Researcher: Jessica Eaton – JEE509@bham.ac.uk
- Supervisor: Dr Jessica Woodhams –
-
- If you have read the provided information and would like to take part, please go to the start of the survey and confirm your participation and consent to take part.
-
- **Sources of Support**
- **GALOP** - 0800 999 5428 E: help@galop.org.uk (Emotional and practical support for LGBTQ+ people experiencing abuse)
- **Rape Crisis England and Wales** - 0808 802 9999 www.rapecrisis.org.uk (Help if you've experienced rape, child sexual abuse and/or any kind of sexual violence)
- **Survivors UK Webchat** – www.survivorsuk.org (a web chat service for men who have experienced sexual violence)
- **NAPAC** - 0808 801 0331 www.napac.org.uk (A national support helpline and website dedicated to adults who have experienced child abuse during their childhood)

Consent

[]

I confirm that I have read all of the information about this study, I understand the focus and content of the questionnaire and I consent to my participation and the use of my answers for the purpose of this study *

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

(If after reading the information, you have decided not to participate, please click no and then close this window)

Demographics

This group of questions seeks to gather basic demographic information of the participants

[]Please choose your gender identity *

Please select at least one answer

Please choose **all** that apply:

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Agender
- ☐ Transgender Woman
- ☐ Transgender Man

- ☐ Gender variant/non-conforming
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Other:

[]Please indicate your age range *

Please choose **all** that apply:

- ☐ 18-25 years old
- ☐ 26-35 years old
- ☐ 36-45 years old
- ☐ 46-55 years old
- ☐ 56-65 years old
- ☐ 66-75 years old
- ☐ 76-85 years old
- ☐ 86-95 years old
- ☐ Over 95 years old

[]Please confirm your ethnicity *

Please choose **all** that apply:

- ☐ White - British/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/English
- ☐ White - Irish
- ☐ White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- ☐ Any other White Background
- ☐ Mixed/Multiple - White and Black Caribbean
- ☐ Mixed/Multiple - White and Black African
- ☐ Mixed/Multiple - White and Asian
- ☐ Any other Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Background
- ☐ Asian - Indian
- ☐ Asian - Pakistani

- ☐ Asian - Bangladeshi
- ☐ Asian - Chinese
- ☐ Any other Asian Background
- ☐ Black - African
- ☐ Black - British
- ☐ Black - Caribbean
- ☐ Any other Black/African/Caribbean Background
- ☐ Arab
- ☐ Any other Ethnic Group
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other:

[] Please confirm your location *

Please choose **all** that apply:

- ☐ England
- ☐ Wales
- ☐ Scotland
- ☐ Northern Ireland
- ☐ Outside of the UK
- ☐ Other:

[] Please indicate your highest level of education *

Please choose **all** that apply:

- ☐ No education or formal schooling
- ☐ Up to secondary/high school, but did not complete secondary/high school
- ☐ Completed secondary/high school without GCSEs or equivalent
- ☐ Completed secondary/high school with GCSEs or equivalent

- ☐ Some college, no qualification or certificate
- ☐ Completed college with qualification or certificate Trade/Technical/Vocational training
- ☐ Some university, did not complete degree
- ☐ Diploma/Certificate
- ☐ Advanced/HE Diploma
- ☐ PG Diploma
- ☐ Foundation Degree
- ☐ Bachelors Degree
- ☐ Masters Degree
- ☐ Professional Degree
- ☐ Doctorate
- ☐ Prefer not to say

[] Please confirm the type of job you have *

Please choose all that apply and provide a comment:

- ☐Roles in Retail
- ☐Roles in Construction
- ☐Roles in Social Care
- ☐Roles in Transport
- ☐Roles in Catering
- ☐Roles in Medicine and Health
- ☐Roles in Psychology and Counselling
- ☐Roles in Finance
- ☐Roles in Education
- ☐Roles in Sales
- ☐Roles in Sports and Physical Activity
- ☐Roles in Politics
- ☐Roles in Engineering
- ☐Roles in Agriculture

- ☐ Roles in IT
- ☐ Roles in Administration
- ☐ Roles in Emergency Services
- ☐ Roles in Law
- ☐ Roles in Beauty and Fashion
- ☐ Roles in Prison and Probation Services
- ☐ Business Owner/Director/Sole Trader
- ☐ Currently not working
- ☐ Other not listed here. Please specify in the comment box
- Other:

[ ] Please indicate your religious beliefs *

Please choose **all** that apply:

- ☐ No religion
- ☐ Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)
- ☐ Buddhist
- ☐ Hindu
- ☐ Jewish
- ☐ Muslim
- ☐ Sikh
- ☐ Any other religion, please describe
- ☐ Other:

BOWSVA Scale

This set of questions provides scenarios of sexual violence and abuse and then ask you to consider the role of the man and woman in each scenario. Please exercise self care during this section.

[]Please read each scenario and then indicate how you feel about the role of each person. *

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	The woman is definitely to blame	The woman is probably to blame	The woman is probably not to blame	The woman is definitely not to blame	The man is definitely to blame	The man is probably to blame	The man is probably not to blame	The man is definitely not to blame
A woman performs unpleasant sexual acts that her husband has seen in porn films because he threatens to leave her if she doesn't	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman who doesn't respect herself or behave like a decent woman is blackmailed into sex by a male friend	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman has been chatting to a guy on a dating site in a sexual manner. He uses the app to find her location and then follows her home where he sexually assaults her.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman has been flirting with a man all night long. She is groped by him against her will as she tries to leave the club.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman who is well known locally for being a slag is eventually raped	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman who has no class is sexually assaulted on a number of occasions by a friend	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman who has two failed marriages is forced to have sex against her will by a new partner	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman chooses to walk home alone through a dangerous area because her bus failed to turn up. While doing so, she is sexually assaulted.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A cheating woman is set up by her secret lover to be raped by one of his friends	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman goes out for the night wearing a sexy dress. While out she is touched on her breast as she walks past a man.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman walks to work even though she knows there was a rape in the area last week. While walking she is groped by a stranger.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman chooses to go back to the hotel bar with a man she just met while out for the night. In the taxi on the way to the hotel, he forces his hand up her skirt even though she asked him not to.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman gets so drunk that she keeps blacking out in a guy's flat. She wakes up the next morning naked and he tells her they had sex during the night.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman tells her boyfriend that she wants to have sex with him but she starts to feel unwell and falls asleep on the sofa. She wakes up to find him performing oral sex on her.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman in a nightclub is twerking on the dancefloor and kissing different men who she doesn't know. When she goes to the toilet, a man forces her into the cubicle and rapes her.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman working in a brothel as a sex worker is forced to have anal sex by a client	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman sends a lot of naked pictures and videos of herself to a guy she is dating from work. Using the pictures, he then blackmails her into kissing and masturbating him.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman is forced to have sex with lots of men to pay off her drug debts	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman who is wearing revealing clothing is catcalled in the street by men who tell her to take her top off	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman who enjoys the attention she gets as a famous glamour model has her skirt lifted up and her vagina touched by a man in a restaurant	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman who shot to fame as a reality TV star finds that the paparazzi have published up-skirt photos of her at an event	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman who likes to dress sexily because it makes her feel good about herself is constantly sexually harassed by the men she works with	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A beautiful woman with a curvaceous figure is on the tube when a man rubs his groin up against her	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman is having sex with her partner and wants to stop because she is no longer aroused but her partner forces her to continue	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman wakes up to find her husband very turned on and touching her vagina whilst she was asleep	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman wanted sex at first but then changed her mind. Her boyfriend told her that she already consented and that it's too late to change her mind	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman who was wearing a clingy dress instead of the appropriate clothing in her community is raped on her way to a family gathering	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A bar maid who is very attractive, is slapped on her bottom whenever she walks past the door staff	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman keeps receiving naked pictures from her work colleague but is too scared to tell him that she is not interested so he keeps sending them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman has sexual comments made to her every morning by her neighbour. She feels there is nothing she can do about it and so has no choice but to accept his comments.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman who has never worked and therefore has no savings of her own stays with her sexually abusive husband.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman who is raped and threatened not to report the offence to the police by her rapist finds out that another woman was raped by the same person the following week	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman who has been homeless for months is offered somewhere to live if she performs sex acts on a number of men each night, so she moves in	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman goes out for a date with a really attractive man from college. He threatens to tell everyone at college that she's had sex with him if she doesn't give him a blowjob.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman really admires and loves her husband but when he's drunk he tells her she must have sex with him even if she doesn't want to because she's his wife.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman makes a sex tape with her boyfriend but then finds out he's shared it with his mates without her knowing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman who makes a real effort with her appearance is suddenly pushed against a wall by a work colleague at a party who then kisses her.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A sex worker who only offers her clients a "hand job" or a "blow job" is forced to have vaginal sex with a client	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

A woman who leaves her friends after an argument on a night out is raped on her way home	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman who sends her friend's boyfriend pictures of her cleavage is then upset when her friend finds them and uploads them to the internet.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman is raped by her brother in law. He threatens to shame her to her family and the community if she says anything.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman gets into a car that she thinks is a minicab. Once locked inside she is forced to give the driver oral sex before he'll let her out.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman is groped by her boss but doesn't tell anyone because she's worried about losing her job	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman who is too scared to say no to her boyfriend lies still and closes her eyes until he has finished having sex with her.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman is on a deserted train home and a stranger pushes her into the corner of the train and forces her hand into his trousers. She doesn't say anything or do anything to stop him.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman is outside of her home when she is approached by a man in a car who stops to ask her for directions. As she gives the directions, she is dragged into the car by the man and then raped.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman was walking her dog in the park when she is violently assaulted by a stranger and then raped multiple times behind some trees	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman was chatting to her friend on her mobile phone. She doesn't realise she is being followed home from work and is then sexually assaulted in a stairwell	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman is walking back from her local shop when she is held at knife point and forced to give oral sex to the perpetrator	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman had just finished an evening board meeting when she is knocked unconscious in a multi-storey carpark and is sexually assaulted	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman was the last person getting off the bus at night when the bus driver, who had just received the news that he was being made redundant, held her down and groped her	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman has been sexually assaulted twice by a distant family member who was sexually abused as a child	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman was at a house party when she realised she had been drugged. She went to seek help but was pulled into a bedroom and raped by a male friend who was also high on drugs.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman was in the unisex showers at her new gym when a man who had been talking to her about his marriage breakdown walks in. He obstructs her only exit and sexually assaults her.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A woman was studying in the library when a man starts to tell her about how depressed he is since his business went bust. She listens to him and he asks her if she is single and when she tells him that she is not interested, he forces his hand up her top.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

IRMAS-Updated

This section will ask for your opinion on statements about sexual intimacy, behaviours and violence. Please exercise self care during this section

.

[]Please use the scales to show your agreement with each statement *

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	1 - Strongly agree	2	3	4	5 - Strongly disagree
If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somwhat responsible for letting things get out of control	○	○	○	○	○
When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble	○	○	○	○	○
If a girl goes to a alone room with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped	○	○	○	○	○
If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble	○	○	○	○	○
When a girl gets raped, its often because the way she said 'no' was unclear	○	○	○	○	○
If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she shouldnt be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex	○	○	○	○	○
When guys rape, its usually because of their strong desire for sex	○	○	○	○	○
Guys dont usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away	○	○	○	○	○
Rape happens when a guy's sex drive goes out of control	○	○	○	○	○
If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally	○	○	○	○	○
It shouldnt be considered rape if the guy was drunk and didnt realise what he was doing	○	○	○	○	○
If both people are drunk, it can't be rape	○	○	○	○	○
If a girl doesnt physically resist sex - even if protesting verbally - it cant be considered rape	○	○	○	○	○
If a girl doesnt physically fight back, you cant really call it a rape	○	○	○	○	○
A rape probably didnt happen if a girl doesnt have any bruises or marks	○	○	○	○	○
If the accused 'rapist' doesnt have a weapon, you really cant call it rape	○	○	○	○	○
If a girl doesn't say 'no', she cant claim rape	○	○	○	○	○
A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to the sex and then regret it	○	○	○	○	○
Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys	○	○	○	○	○
A lot of times, girls who say they were raped lead the guy on and then had regrets	○	○	○	○	○
A lot of times, girls who say they were raped have emotional problems	○	○	○	○	○
Girls who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim it was rape	○	○	○	○	○

Feedback and Prize Draw

[]

What was your experience of taking this study?

Please write your answer here:

Please use this space to make any comments about your thoughts about this study, the questions, your own answers or thought processes whilst answering. This is a free text box, so write as little or as much as you would like.

[]

Thank you so much for participating in this study. We understand that the topic is sensitive and you may prefer to remain completely anonymous. However, if you would like to leave your email address securely by clicking this link, you will be entered into a prize draw for one of ten £10 amazon vouchers.

https://lesweb2.bham.ac.uk/surveys/index.php?r=survey/index/sid/981465/lang/en

When you click the link above, it will take you to a separate and secure page which can store your email address away from your answers so you cannot be identified. If you would like to be entered into the prize draw, please COPY and PASTE the link into a new tab or window and then press ENTER.

If you don't want to take part, simply show that you have understood this section by selecting YES below.

If you did leave your email address on the separate link, show that you have understood this section by also selecting YES below.

I understand that it was my choice to leave my email address and that if I did leave my email address, that it is being collected separately and securely away from my answers. *

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Debrief page

- Thank you for taking part in this study. This information sheet offers further information about the background to this research. The study you have just assisted with was a pilot for a new way to measure how people perceive various kinds of sexual offences against women.
- Sexual assault, abuse and rape are common experiences of women all over the world. Unfortunately, what is equally as common is women who experience victim blaming from their loved ones, their peer group and from professional bodies such as the police and the health services they approach.
- The pilot test that you just completed had scenarios of all different kinds of sexual offences in which the victim, the perpetrator and the sexual offence were described in different ways. This aim of this is to test whether particular types of offences are more likely to be blamed on the victim or blamed on the perpetrator.

- Research has shown that victims are less likely to be blamed if it is absolutely clear that they had no behavioural or characterological faults in the incident and they made no choices or decisions that could be seen as contributing to their attack. Therefore the scenarios included situations where the woman may have been perceived as making a choice or a decision.
- This study is being carried out with over one thousand people from backgrounds as diverse as possible. When all of the data is collated together and analysed, it will provide information about whether this way of measuring victim blaming work accurately and reliably. It may well give us information about how it should be amended or changed to make it more accurate or more reliable.
- No matter what your answers were, you have contributed to an important study of the attitudes thousands of people hold towards offenders and victims of sexual violence in the UK – and from all of the answers, we can work to understand the reasons why people may blame a victim of a sexual offence or excuse the perpetrator.
- Thank you for your time and thoughts today.
- If you do need further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.
- The results from this study will be used in the PhD Psychology thesis of Jessica Eaton of the University of Birmingham and may therefore be published in other journals, presentations and spoken about at conferences.
- Please remember these important points from the information sheet:
    - Once the answers from this study have been analysed and reported, it will not be possible to remove your answers so if you do change your mind and would like to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher before 21st April 2017. If you would like to withdraw from this study, please contact Dr Jessica Woodhams anonymously, quoting your personal code that you created at the beginning of this study and asking for your answers to be removed. You can contact Dr Woodhams by leaving an anonymous message on the voicemail system of [redacted] including your personal code. You can also write an anonymous letter and send it to Dr Jessica Woodhams/Jessica Eaton at School of Psychology, Frankland Building, Edgbaston Campus, University of Birmingham B15 2TT.
    - If you chose to leave your email address for the prize draw, your email address was collected and stored separately from your survey responses to maintain your anonymity. If you do decide to withdraw from this study, your email address will remain in the raffle prize draw to acknowledge the time you have given to this study. You can make the choice to contact the researchers to have your email address also removed from the prize draw but please be aware that this may affect your anonymity. If you no longer want the chance to win the vouchers and you wish to remain anonymous, you can choose to leave your email address in the prize draw and then ignore any winning emails and a further prize winner will be drawn after two weeks has elapsed. Alternatively, you could ask someone else to contact the researchers on your behalf with your email address so that it can be removed without revealing your identity.
    - You are welcome to request the results of this study and to read the final report when it is completed. If you would like to do so, please email us at JEE509@bham.ac.uk or [redacted] – however, please be aware that if you do email us, and you email address contained your full name or your place of work, this will affect your anonymity.
- You are welcome to contact the researcher or the supervisor of the researcher for further information or to ask questions about this study, the data and the publication.
- Doctoral Researcher: Jessica Eaton – JEE509@bham.ac.uk
- Supervisor: Dr Jessica Woodhams – [redacted]
-
- **Sources of Support**
- **GALOP** - 0800 999 5428 E: help@galop.org.uk (Emotional and practical support for LGBTQ+ people experiencing abuse)
- **Rape Crisis England and Wales** - 0808 802 9999 www.rapecrisis.org.uk (Help if you've experienced rape, child sexual abuse and/or any kind of sexual violence)
- **Survivors UK Webchat** – www.survivorsuk.org (a web chat service for men who have experienced sexual violence)
- **NAPAC** - 0808 801 0331 www.napac.org.uk (A national support helpline and website dedicated to adults who have experienced child abuse during their childhood)

Submit your survey.
Thank you for completing this survey.

Appendix 3a

List of all items from existing psychometric measures

Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (U-IRMAS)

Subscale 1: She asked for it - VB

1. If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand.

2. When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble. VB

3. If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped.

4. If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble.

5. When girls get raped, it's often because the way they said "no" was unclear.

6. If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex.

Subscale 2: He didn't mean to

7. When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.

8. Guys don't usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.

9. Rape happens when a guy's sex drive goes out of control.

10. If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.

11. It shouldn't be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn't realize what he was doing.

12. If both people are drunk, it can't be rape.

Subscale 3: It wasn't really rape

13. If a girl doesn't physically resist sex—even if protesting verbally—it can't be considered rape.

14. If a girl doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape.

15. A rape probably doesn't happen if a girl doesn't have any bruises or marks.

16. If the accused "rapist" doesn't have a weapon, you really can't call it rape.

17. If a girl doesn't say "no" she can't claim rape.

Subscale 4: She lied

18. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it.

19. Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys.

20. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped often led the guy on and then had regrets. VB

21. A lot of times, girls who claim they were raped have emotional problems. VB

22. Girls who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim it was rape.

Acceptance of modern myths about sexual aggression (AMMSA Scale)

1. When it comes to sexual contacts, women expect men to take the lead.

2. Once a man and a woman have started "making out", a woman's misgivings against sex will automatically disappear.

3. A lot of women strongly complain about sexual infringements for no real reason, just to appear emancipated.

4. To get custody for their children, women often falsely accuse their ex-husband of a tendency towards sexual violence.

5. Interpreting harmless gestures as "sexual harassment" is a popular weapon in the battle of the sexes.

6. It is a biological necessity for men to release sexual pressure from time to time.

7. After a rape, women nowadays receive ample support.

8. Nowadays, a large proportion of rapes is partly caused by the depiction of sexuality in the media as this raises the sex drive of potential perpetrators.

9. If a woman invites a man to her home for a cup of coffee after a night out this means that she wants to have sex.

10. As long as they don’t go too far, suggestive remarks and allusions simply tell a woman that she is attractive.

11. Any woman who is careless enough to walk through “dark alleys” at night is partly to be blamed if she is raped.

12. When a woman starts a relationship with a man, she must be aware that the man will assert his right to have sex.

13. Most women prefer to be praised for their looks rather than their intelligence.

14. Because the fascination caused by sex is disproportionately large, our society’s sensitivity to crimes in this area is disproportionate as well.

15. Women like to play coy. This does not mean that they do not want sex.

16. Many women tend to exaggerate the problem of male violence.

17. When a man urges his female partner to have sex, this cannot be called rape.

18. When a single woman invites a single man to her flat she signals that she is not averse to having sex.

19. When politicians deal with the topic of rape, they do so mainly because this topic is likely to attract the attention of the media.

20. When defining "marital rape", there is no clear-cut distinction between normal conjugal intercourse and rape.

21. A man’s sexuality functions like a steam boiler – when the pressure gets too high, he has to "let off steam".

22. Women often accuse their husbands of marital rape just to retaliate for a failed relationship.

23. The discussion about sexual harassment on the job has mainly resulted in many a harmless behaviour being misinterpreted as harassment.

24. In dating situations the general expectation is that the woman "hits the brakes" and the man "pushes ahead".

25. Although the victims of armed robbery have to fear for their lives, they receive far less psychological support than do rape victims.

26. Alcohol is often the culprit when a man rapes a woman.

27. Many women tend to misinterpret a well-meant gesture as a "sexual assault".

28. Nowadays, the victims of sexual violence receive sufficient help in the form of women’s shelters, therapy offers, and support groups.

29. Instead of worrying about alleged victims of sexual violence society should rather attend to more urgent problems, such as environmental destruction.

30. Nowadays, men who really sexually assault women are punished justly.

Burt 1980 Sexual Attitudes Scale

Sex role stereotyping

A man should fight when the woman he's with is insulted by another man.

It is acceptable for the woman to pay for the date.

A woman should be a virgin when she marries.

There is something wrong with a woman who doesn't want to marry and raise a family.

A wife should never contradict her husband in public.

It is better for a woman to use her feminine charm to get what she wants rather than ask for it outright.

It is acceptable for a woman to have a career, but marriage and family should come first.

It looks worse for a woman to be drunk than for a man to be drunk.

There is nothing wrong with a woman going to a bar alone.

Adversarial sexual beliefs

A woman will only respect a man who will lay down the law to her.

Many women are so demanding sexually that a man just can't satisfy them.

A man's got to show the woman who's boss right from the start or he'll end up henpecked.

Women are usually sweet until they've caught a man, but then they let their true self show.

A lot of men talk big, but when it comes down to it, they can't perform well sexually.

In a dating relationship a woman is largely out to take advantage of a man.

Men are out for only one thing.

Most women are sly and manipulating when they are out to attract a man.

A lot of women seem to get pleasure in putting men down.

Sexual conservatism

A woman who initiates a sexual encounter will probably have sex with anybody.

A woman shouldn't give in sexually to a man too easily or he'll think she's loose.

Men have a biologically stronger sex drive than women.

A nice woman will be offended or embarassed by dirty jokes.

Masturbation is a normal sexual activity.

People should not have oral sex.

I would have no respect for a woman who engages in sexual relationships without any emotional involvement.

Having sex during the menstrual period is unpleasant.

The primary goal of sexual intercourse should be to have children.

Women have the same needs for a sexual outlet as men.

Acceptance of interpersonal violence

People today should not use "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" as a rule for living.

Being roughed up is sexually stimulating to many women.

Many times a woman will pretend she doesn't want to have intercourse because she doesn't want to seem loose, but she's really hoping the man will force her.

A wife should move out of the house if her husband hits her.

Sometimes the only way a man can get a cold woman turned on is to use force.

A man is never justified in hitting his wife.

Personal Victim Blaming Scale (Vignette) (PVBS Scale)

Instructions: Please rate the victim on the following qualities:

Violent - Non violent

Gentle - Forceful

Insane - Sane

Good Natured - Vicious

Mean - Kind

Blameless - Blameworthy

Fault - Faultless

Harmful - Harmless

Hurtful - Not hurtful

Responsible - Irresponsible

Careful - Reckless

Pays careful attention - Careless

Reliable - Unreliable

Dependable - Undependable

Appendix 3b

Examples of analysis of existing psychometric measure items

Overlapping item analysis

Example of a table used to explore which existing psychometric measures contained items that were similar or identical to other psychometric measures being examined.

Item	BURT	UIRMAS	AMMSA	PVBS
If a girl goes into a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped		X	XX	
If a girl initiates hooking up or kissing, she should not be surprised if the guy wants sex	X	X	X	
If a guy is drunk he might rape someone unintentionally		X	X	
It shouldn't be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn't realise what he was doing		X	X	
If both people are drunk, it can't be rape		X	X	
A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then changed their minds	X	X		
Rape accusations are often used as a way to get back at men		X	X	
A lot of times, girls who say they were raped, led the guy on	X	X	X	

General Critique after content analysis

Scale	Critique
U-IRMAS	• 4 subscales but they all measure RMA rather than victim blaming • Uses the words 'responsible' and 'fault' in one item each but not the word 'blame' • Item 1,2,3,4,5 from subscale 'she asked for it' are statements of victim blaming • There were no items from subscale 2 that could be perceived as victim blaming • Item 13, 14, 17 from subscale 3 'it wasn't really rape' are statements of mixed RMA and VB – not fully VB statements • Item 20 &21 from subscale 4 'she lied' are statements of RMA that blame the victim but are not fully VB statements • Some of the statements are very closely worded and might inflate reliability and participant score due to repetition
AMMSA	• No subscales for this scale • Uses the phrase 'partly to blame' once but the rest of the items do not contain any words such as 'blame', 'responsibility', 'fault' or 'cause' • Mainly this measures attitudes and RMA • Items 3,9,11,15,18 and 27 could possibly be perceived as VB, some of these are debatable and need further consideration
Burt	• 5 subscales of which none really measure victim blaming at all and don't profess to. • There is only one item from this scale that could be

	perceived as victim blaming and there are a few RM's but nothing more. • The rest of the items are based on other general things such as sexism and violence. • This scale does not measure VB.
PVBS	• Uses a vignette • Participants read the vignette and then rate the characteristics of the victim • The items on the scale heavily overlap and are repetitive • Only one item says 'blame'

Appendix 3c

Example of tally system used to check the language and content in new BOWSVA items

BOWSVA Item #	Overt	Subtle	Stereotypical	Non-stereotypical	Woman had choice	Constrained choice	Stranger Perp	Familiar Perp	Vulnerable Woman	Non vulnerable woman	Character-ological blame	Behavioural blame
1		1		1	1			1		1		1
2	1		1		1		1			1	1	
3		1	1		1		1			1		1
4	1		1		1		1			1	1	1
5	1		1		1		1			1	1	
6	1		1		1		1			1	1	
7		1		1	1	1		1		1	1	
8	1		1		1		1		1			1
9		1		1		1		1	1			1
10	1		1		1		1			1		1
11	1		1		1		1			1		1
12	1		1		1		1			1		1
13		1		1		1		1	1			1
14		1		1		1		1	1			1
15	1		1		1		1	1		1		1
16		1		1		1	1		1			1
17		1		1		1		1		1		1
18	1		1			1	1		1		0	0
19		1	1		1		1			1		1
20	1			1	1		1			1	1	1
21	1			1	1		1			1		1
22		1	1		1			1		1		1
23	1		1		1		1	1		1		1
24		1		1		1		1	1		0	0
25		1		1		1		1	1		0	0
26		1		1		1		1	1			1
27		1		1	1			1	1			1
28	1		1		1			1		1		1
29		1		1	1			1	1		1	
30		1		1	1		1			1	1	
31		1		1	1			1	1			1
32		1		1	1		1		1			1
33		1		1		1	1		1			1

BOWSVA Item #	Uses word 'rape'	Uses word 'sexual assault'	Uses 'forced to'	Uses 'touched or groped'	Uses emotional terms e.g. manipulated, harrassed	Does not specify the act or method
1			1			
2					1	
3		1				
4				1		
5	1					
6		1				
7	1					
8		1				
9					1	
10				1		
11	1					
12	1					
13						1
14						1
15	1					
16			1			
17					1	
18			1			
19						1
20				1		
21	1					
22					1	
23	1					
24						1
25	1					
26						1
27	1					
28				1		
29						1
30						1
31		1				
32	1					
33						1
34	1					
35		1				
36						1
37	1					
38		1				
39	1					

Appendix 4

Face Validity Questionnaire

Hello and welcome to this exercise to assess the validity of the items I have been developing for a new psychometric measure of victim blaming. I have entitled the scale 'BOWSVA' (pronounced 'bows-va') which means 'Blame Of Women Subjected to Sexual Violence or Abuse'.

All ethical issues have been covered satisfactorily including the distress of the participant, accessibility, use of data and so on, so please do not comment about these issues. However, I am interested in your views on the structure of the items, the wording and your opinions on how realistic they are and what type of response you think they will get from the general public.

In the BOWSVA for the general public, the participant reads the items you are about to read and then apportions blame to the woman AND the man. They are asked how much the woman is to blame and how much the man is to blame. They are not given a neutral or middle-ground answer.

I have approached a number of people for this stage of testing who I consider to have a high level of knowledge or experience in sexual violence - whether that is through frontline working with victims or through management, research, lecturing or developmental work.

Please treat this exercise as confidential and do not share these items, materials or your answers with anyone else.

Your answers will remain confidential but unfortunately I cannot guarantee anonymity due to knowing the people I have invited to take part and also due to asking for your gender, job roles and age in the demographics. If you would prefer not to take part, you are free to withdraw before you start, at any time during the exercise and even after you have submitted your answers, by emailing me at JEE509@bham.ac.uk.

I will use your answers to consider any changes that need to be made, any concerns people have about wording or credibility of each scenario (or anything else you come up with).

I really appreciate the time you are giving to help me with this. Thank you.

Jessica

There are 7 questions in this survey

Demographics

This group of questions seeks to gather basic demographic information of the participants

[]Please choose your gender identity *

Please select at least one answer

Please choose **all** that apply:

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Agender
- ☐ Transgender Woman
- ☐ Transgender Man
- ☐ Gender variant/non-conforming
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Other:

[]Please indicate your age range *

Please choose **all** that apply:

- ☐ 18-25 years old
- ☐ 26-35 years old
- ☐ 36-45 years old
- ☐ 46-55 years old
- ☐ 56-65 years old
- ☐ 66-75 years old
- ☐ 76-85 years old
- ☐ 86-95 years old
- ☐ Over 95 years old

[] Please confirm your location *

Please choose **all** that apply:

- ☐ England
- ☐ Wales
- ☐ Scotland
- ☐ Northern Ireland

- ☐ Outside of the UK
- ☐ Other:

[] Please indicate your highest level of education *

Please choose **all** that apply:

- ☐ No education or formal schooling
- ☐ Up to secondary/high school, but did not complete secondary/high school
- ☐ Completed secondary/high school without GCSEs or equivalent
- ☐ Completed secondary/high school with GCSEs or equivalent
- ☐ Some college, no qualification or certificate
- ☐ Completed college with qualification or certificate Trade/Technical/Vocational training
- ☐ Some university, did not complete degree
- ☐ Diploma/Certificate
- ☐ Advanced/HE Diploma
- ☐ PG Diploma
- ☐ Foundation Degree
- ☐ Bachelors Degree
- ☐ Masters Degree
- ☐ Professional Degree
- ☐ Doctorate
- ☐ Prefer not to say

[] Please confirm the type of job you have *

Please choose all that apply and provide a comment:

- ☐ Roles in Social Care
- ☐ Roles in Medicine and Health
- ☐ Roles in Psychology and Counselling
- ☐ Roles in Education

- ☐ Roles in Administration
- ☐ Roles in Emergency Services
- ☐ Roles in Law
- ☐ Roles in Prison and Probation Services
- ☐ Roles in Charitable Organisations
- ☐ Other not listed here. Please specify in the comment box
- Other:

BOWESVA face validity exercise

[]Please read each scenario and then indicate your response to each question in the columns to the right

	Do you think this scenario is realistic? Y/N/Comment	Do you think this scenario is clearly worded? Y/N/Comment	Do you think this scenario is likely to generate a VB response? Y/N/Comment	Any other comments you would like to make on this scenario:
A woman performs unpleasant sexual acts that her husband has seen in porn films because he threatens to leave her if she doesn't				
A woman who doesn't respect herself or behave like a decent woman is blackmailed into sex by a male friend				
A woman has been chatting to a guy on a dating site in a sexual manner. He uses the app to find her location and then follows her home where he sexually assaults her.				
A woman has been flirting with a man all night long. She is groped by him against her will as she tries to leave the club.				
A woman who is well known locally for being a slag is eventually raped				
A woman who has no class is sexually assaulted on a number of occasions by a friend				
A woman who has two failed marriages is forced to have sex against her will by a new partner				
A woman chooses to walk home alone through a dangerous area because her bus failed to turn up. While doing so, she is sexually assaulted.				
A cheating woman is set up by her secret lover to be raped by one of his friends				
A woman goes out for the night wearing a sexy dress. While out she is touched on her breast as she walks past a man.				
A woman walks to work even though she knows there was a rape in the area last week. While walking she is groped by a stranger.				
A woman chooses to go back to the hotel bar with a man she just met while out for the night. In the taxi on the way to the hotel, he forces his hand up her skirt even though she asked him not to.				
A woman gets so drunk that she keeps blacking out in a guy's flat. She wakes up the next morning naked and he tells her they had sex during the night.				
A woman tells her boyfriend that she wants to have sex with him but she starts to feel unwell and falls asleep on the sofa. She wakes up to find him performing oral sex on her.				
A woman in a nightclub is twerking on the dancefloor and kissing different men who she doesn't know. When she goes to the toilet, a man forces her into the cubicle and rapes her.				
A woman working in a brothel as a sex worker is forced to have anal sex by a client				
A woman makes a sex tape with her boyfriend but then finds out he's shared it with his mates without her knowing				
A woman who makes a real effort with her appearance is suddenly pushed against a wall by a work colleague at a party who then kisses her.				
A sex worker who only offers her clients a "hand job" or a "blow job" is forced to have vaginal sex with a client				
A woman who leaves her friends after an argument on a night out is raped on her way home				
A woman who sends her friend's boyfriend pictures of her cleavage is then upset when her friend finds them and uploads them to the Internet.				
A woman is raped by her brother in law. He threatens to shame her to her family and the community if she says anything.				
A woman gets into a car that she thinks is a minicab. Once locked inside she is forced to give the driver oral sex before he'll let her out.				
A woman is groped by her boss but doesn't tell anyone because she's worried about losing her job				
A woman who is too scared to say no to her boyfriend lies still and closes her eyes until he has finished having sex with her.				
A woman is on a deserted train home and a stranger pushes her into the corner of the train and forces her hand into his trousers. She doesn't say anything or do anything to stop him.				
A woman is outside of her home when she is approached by a man in a car who stops to ask her for directions. As she gives the directions, she is dragged into the car by the man and then raped.				
A woman was walking her dog in the park when she is violently assaulted by a stranger and then raped multiple times behind some trees				
A woman was chatting to her friend on her mobile phone. She doesn't realise she is being followed home from work and is then sexually assaulted in a stairwell				
A woman is walking back from her local shop when she is held at knife point and forced to give oral sex to the perpetrator				
A woman had just finished an evening board meeting when she is knocked unconscious in a multi-storey carpark and is sexually assaulted				
A woman was the last person getting off the bus at night when the bus driver, who had just received the news that he was being made redundant, held her down and groped her				
A woman has been sexually assaulted twice by a distant family member who was sexually abused as a child				
A woman was at a house party when she realised she had been drugged. She went to seek help but was pulled into a bedroom and raped by a male friend who was also high on drugs.				
A woman was in the unisex showers at her new gym when a man who had been talking to her about his marriage breakdown walks in. He obstructs her only exit and sexually assaults her.				

A woman sends a lot of naked pictures and videos of herself to a guy she is dating from work. Using the pictures, he then blackmails her into kissing and masturbating him.				
A woman is forced to have sex with lots of men to pay off her drug debts				
A woman who is wearing revealing clothing is catcalled in the street by men who tell her to take her top off				
A woman who enjoys the attention she gets as a famous glamour model has her skirt lifted up and her vagina touched by a man in a restaurant				
A woman who shot to fame as a reality TV star finds that the paparazzi have published up-skirt photos of her at an event				
A woman who likes to dress sexily because it makes her feel good about herself is constantly sexually harassed by the men she works with				
A beautiful woman with a curvaceous figure is on the tube when a man rubs his groin up against her				
A woman is having sex with her partner and wants to stop because she is no longer aroused but her partner forces her to continue				
A woman wakes up to find her husband very turned on and touching her vagina whilst she was asleep				
A woman wanted sex at first but then changed her mind. Her boyfriend told her that she already consented and that it's too late to change her mind				
A woman who was wearing a clingy dress instead of the appropriate clothing in her community is raped on her way to a family gathering				
A bar maid who is very attractive, is slapped on her bottom whenever she walks past the door staff				
A woman keeps receiving naked pictures from her work colleague but is too scared to tell him that she is not interested so he keeps sending them				
A woman has sexual comments made to her every morning by her neighbour. She feels there is nothing she can do about it and so has no choice but to accept his comments.				
A woman who has never worked and therefore has no savings of her own stays with her sexually abusive husband.				
A woman who is raped and threatened not to report the offence to the police by her rapist finds out that another woman was raped by the same person the following week				
A woman who has been homeless for months is offered somewhere to live if she performs sex acts on a number of men each night, so she moves in				
A woman goes out for a date with a really attractive man from college. He threatens to tell everyone at college that she's had sex with him if she doesn't give him a blowjob.				
A woman really admires and loves her husband but when he's drunk he tells her she must have sex with him even if she doesn't want to because she's his wife.				
A woman was studying in the library when a man starts to tell her about how depressed he is since his business went bust. She listens to him and he asks her if she is single and when she tells him that she is not interested, he forces his hand up her top.				

[]Please use this free text box to make any other comments about the scenarios you have just read or put N/A

Please write your answer here:

ıank you so much for giving you time to help me with this today.

you would like to discuss further, give me an email on JEE509@bham.ac.uk

Appendix 5

BOWSVA pattern matrix results

Highlighted components in yellow and cross loads around or over .3 (or multiple cross loads across components that cause concern) in red

Pattern Matrix[a]

	Component						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
[F A woman who is wearing revealing clothing is catcalled in the street by men who tell her to take her top off]	.568	-.049	-.010	.277	-.018	.105	.198
[F A woman chooses to walk home alone through a dangerous area because her bus failed to turn up. While doing so, she is sexually assaulted.]	.549	.337	.127	-.164	.111	.079	-.026
[F A woman goes out for the night wearing a sexy dress. While out she is touched on her breast as she walks past a man.]	.473	.113	-.078	.093	.269	.083	.076
[F A woman in a nightclub is twerking on the dancefloor and kissing different men who she doesn't know. When she goes to the toilet, a man forces her into the cubicle and rapes her.]	.472	.190	.030	.116	.006	.099	.290
[F A woman who likes to dress sexily because it makes her feel good about herself is constantly sexually harassed by the men she works with]	.459	-.174	.170	.232	.010	.228	.179
[F A woman gets so drunk that she keeps blacking out in a guy's flat. She wakes up the next morning naked and he tells her they had sex during the night.]	.426	.021	.166	.030	.007	-.098	.315
[F A woman has been chatting to a guy on a dating site in a sexual manner. He uses the app to find her location and then follows her home where he sexually assaults her.]	.376	.329	.195	-.025	-.126	-.005	.157
[F A woman who is well known locally for being a slag is eventually raped]	.375	.358	-.062	.003	-.033	.131	.299

[F A woman walks to work even though she knows there was a rape in the area last week. While walking she is groped by a stranger.]	.321	.245	.241	-.012	.080	.105	.101
[F A woman who leaves her friends after an argument on a night out is raped on her way home]	.081	.663	-.025	.082	.025	.099	.073
[F A woman is raped by her brother in law. He threatens to shame her to her family and the community if she says anything.]	.089	.585	.170	-.279	.187	-.054	.110
[F A woman is on a deserted train home and a stranger pushes her into the corner of the train and forces her hand into his trousers. She doesn't say anything or do anything to stop him.]	.086	.583	.240	.051	-.084	-.069	.056
[F A bar maid who is very attractive, is slapped on her bottom whenever she walks past the door staff]	-.045	.547	.192	.139	.071	-.009	.031
[FA woman who has no class is sexually assaulted on a number of occasions by a friend]	.233	.534	.113	.169	-.093	.198	-.141
[F A woman was walking her dog in the park when she is violently assaulted by a stranger and then raped multiple times behind some trees]	-.210	.498	-.104	.061	.225	.158	.130
[F A cheating woman is set up by her secret lover to be raped by one of his friends]	.138	.411	.031	.174	.071	.142	.150
[F A woman is walking back from her local shop when she is held at knife point and forced to give oral sex to the perpetrator]	-.049	.366	-.090	.062	.245	.263	-.082
[F A woman performs unpleasant sexual acts that her husband has seen in porn films because he threatens to leave her if she doesn't]	-.155	-.229	.756	-.135	.030	.229	.138
[F A woman has sexual comments made to her every morning by her neighbour. She feels there is nothing she can do about it and so has no choice but to accept his comments.]	-.030	.108	.741	-.012	.162	-.085	.035

[F A woman who has never worked and therefore has no savings of her own stays with her sexually abusive husband.]	.049	.041	.707	.109	.000	-.041	.002
[F A woman who is too scared to say no to her boyfriend lies still and closes her eyes until he has finished having sex with her.]	-.029	.152	.652	.092	.025	-.050	.051
[F A woman keeps receiving naked pictures from her work colleague but is too scared to tell him that she is not interested so he keeps sending them]	.163	.134	.619	.046	-.057	-.048	.018
[F A woman is groped by her boss but doesn't tell anyone because she's worried about losing her job]	-.097	.123	.596	-.261	.174	.181	.176
[F A woman who has been homeless for months is offered somewhere to live if she performs sex acts on a number of men each night, so she moves in	.080	-.022	.560	.286	-.168	-.038	.029
[F A woman really admires and loves her husband but when he's drunk he tells her she must have sex with him even if she doesn't want to because she's his wife.]	-.008	.122	.528	.200	.071	.285	-.221
[F A woman who is raped and threatened not to report the offence to the police by her rapist finds out that another woman was raped by the same person the following week]	.288	.167	.443	-.132	.126	-.005	.019
[F A woman who sends her friend's boyfriend pictures of her cleavage is then upset when her friend finds them and uploads them to the Internet.]	.286	-.068	.301	.247	-.035	-.138	.197
[F A woman wakes up to find her husband very turned on and touching her vagina whilst she was asleep]	-.091	.033	.054	.664	.136	.098	.077
[F A woman is having sex with her partner and wants to stop because she is no longer aroused but her partner forces her to continue]	.134	.055	.103	.481	.102	.111	.156

[F A woman tells her boyfriend that she wants to have sex with him but she starts to feel unwell and falls asleep on the sofa. She wakes up to find him performing oral sex on her.	.099	.143	.076	.401	-.106	.016	.199
[F A woman was the last person getting off the bus at night when the bus driver, who had just received the news that he was being made redundant, held her down and groped her]	-.044	-.005	.034	.099	.683	-.162	.015
[F A woman was in the unisex showers at her new gym when a man who had been talking to her about his marriage breakdown walks in. He obstructs her only exit and sexually assaults her.]	.467	-.087	-.061	-.063	.633	.205	-.081
[F A woman goes out for a date with a really attractive man from college. He threatens to tell everyone at college that she's had sex with him if she doesn't give him a blowjob.]	.110	.014	.265	-.092	.588	.063	.047
[F A woman was studying in the library when a man starts to tell her about how depressed he is since his business went bust. She listens to him and he asks her if she is single and when she tells him that she is not interested, he forces his hand up her t	-.185	.301	.008	.274	.396	.184	.028
[F A woman was at a house party when she realised she had been drugged. She went to seek help but was pulled into a bedroom and raped by a male friend who was also high on drugs.]	-.014	.372	.057	.141	.376	.251	.106
[F A woman who was wearing a clingy dress instead of the appropriate clothing in her community is raped on her way to a family gathering]	.378	-.110	.059	.058	-.179	.757	-.029
[F A woman is outside of her home when she is approached by a man in a car who stops to ask her for directions. As she gives the directions, she is dragged into the car by the man and then raped.]	-.048	.023	.055	.070	-.020	.716	.031

[F A beautiful woman with a curvaceous figure is on the tube when a man rubs his groin up against her]	.049	.145	.057	.219	.170	.522	-.151
[F A woman who makes a real effort with her appearance is suddenly pushed against a wall by a work colleague at a party who then kisses her.]	-.110	.090	.025	-.020	.099	.516	.320
[F A woman had just finished an evening board meeting when she is knocked unconscious in a multi-storey carpark and is sexually assaulted]	-.045	.133	.008	.041	.280	.490	.080
[F A woman was chatting to her friend on her mobile phone. She doesn't realise she is being followed home from work and is then sexually assaulted in a stairwell]	.058	.087	.012	-.135	.293	.392	.279
[F A woman who has two failed marriages is forced to have sex against her will by a new partner]	-.108	.270	-.025	.263	.186	.370	.177
[F A woman has been sexually assaulted twice by a distant family member who was sexually abused as a child]	-.054	.281	-.003	-.111	-.005	.316	.105
[F A woman who shot to fame as a reality TV star finds that the paparazzi have published up-skirt photos of her at an event]	-.156	-.032	.069	.017	.075	.004	.755
[F A woman working in a brothel as a sex worker is forced to have anal sex by a client]	.102	.189	-.054	.215	-.087	.017	.551
[F A sex worker who only offers her clients a "hand job" or a "blow job" is forced to have vaginal sex with a client]	.130	.159	-.062	.196	.022	.081	.547
[F A woman is forced to have sex with lots of men to pay off her drug debts]	.048	-.011	.264	.106	-.106	.082	.532
[F A woman who enjoys the attention she gets as a famous glamour model has her skirt lifted up and her vagina touched by a man in a restaurant]	.198	.083	-.024	-.063	.069	.197	.511
[F A woman has been flirting with a man all night long. She is groped by him against her will as she tries to leave the club.]	.431	-.012	.027	.169	.060	-.124	.467

[F A woman sends a lot of naked pictures and videos of herself to a guy she is dating from work. Using the pictures, he then blackmails her into kissing and masturbating him.]	.216	-.032	.325	.066	.040	-.108	.412
[F A woman makes a sex tape with her boyfriend but then finds out he's shared it with his mates without her knowing]	.201	-.046	.235	.206	.050	-.035	.406
[F A woman chooses to go back to the hotel bar with a man she just met while out for the night. In the taxi on the way to the hotel, he forces his hand up her skirt even though she asked him not to.]	.194	.058	.191	-.015	.109	.168	.372
[F A woman wanted sex at first but then changed her mind. Her boyfriend told her that she already consented and that it's too late to change her mind]	.120	.239	.093	.178	.102	.119	.335
[F A woman gets into a car that she thinks is a minicab. Once locked inside she is forced to give the driver oral sex before he'll let her out.]	.095	.267	.141	-.239	-.191	.262	.325
[F A woman who doesn't respect herself or behave like a decent woman is blackmailed into sex by a male friend]	.251	.243	.248	-.062	.006	-.009	.287

Appendix 6

Final BOWSVA items

Subscale 1: She was asking for it

1. A woman chooses to walk home alone through a dangerous area because her bus failed to turn up. While doing so, she is sexually assaulted
2. A woman goes out for the night wearing a sexy dress. While out she is touched on her breast as she walks past a man
3. A woman gets so drunk that she keeps blacking out in a guy's flat. She wakes up the next morning naked and he tells her they had sex during the night.
4. A woman in a nightclub is twerking on the dancefloor and kissing different men who she doesn't know. When she goes to the toilet, a man forces her into the cubicle and rapes her.
5. A woman who is wearing revealing clothing is catcalled in the street by men who tell her to take her top off
6. A woman who likes to dress sexily because it makes her feel good about herself is constantly sexually harassed by the men she works with

Subscale 2: The situation was dangerous

1. A woman who has no class is sexually assaulted on a number of occasions by a friend
2. A cheating woman is set up by her secret lover to be raped by one of his friends
3. A bar maid who is very attractive, is slapped on her bottom whenever she walks past the door staff
4. A woman who leaves her friends after an argument on a night out is raped on her way home
5. A woman is raped by her brother in law. He threatens to shame her to her family and the community if she says anything.
6. A woman is on a deserted train home and a stranger pushes her into the corner of the train and forces her hand into his trousers. She doesn't say anything or do anything to stop him.
7. A woman was walking her dog in the park when she is violently assaulted by a stranger and then raped multiple times behind some trees
8. A woman is walking back from her local shop when she is held at knife point and forced to give oral sex to the perpetrator

Subscale 3: She should have been more assertive

1. A woman performs unpleasant sexual acts that her husband has seen in porn films because he threatens to leave her if she doesn't
2. A woman keeps receiving naked pictures from her work colleague but is too scared to tell him that she is not interested so he keeps sending them
3. A woman has sexual comments made to her every morning by her neighbour. She feels there is nothing she can do about it and so has no choice but to accept his comments
4. A woman who has never worked and therefore has no savings of her own stays with her sexually abusive husband

5. A woman who has been homeless for months is offered somewhere to live if she performs sex acts on a number of men each night, so she moves in
6. A woman really admires and loves her husband but when he's drunk, he tells her she must have sex with him even if she doesn't want to because she's his wife.
7. A woman is groped by her boss but doesn't tell anyone because she's worried about losing her job
8. A woman who is too scared to say no to her boyfriend lies still and closes her eyes until he has finished having sex with her.

Subscale 4: He is entitled to her body

1. A woman tells her boyfriend that she wants to have sex with him but she starts to feel unwell and falls asleep on the sofa. She wakes up to find him performing oral sex on her
2. A woman is having sex with her partner and wants to stop because she is no longer aroused but her partner forces her to continue
3. A woman wakes up to find her husband very turned on and touching her vagina whilst she was asleep

Subscale 5: Non-stereotypical offender

1. A woman goes out for a date with a really attractive man from college. He threatens to tell everyone at college that she's had sex with him if she doesn't give him a blowjob
2. A woman was the last person getting off the bus at night when the bus driver, who had just received the news that he was being made redundant, held her down and groped her
3. A woman was at a house party when she realised she had been drugged. She went to seek help but was pulled into a bedroom and raped by a male friend who was also high on drugs
4. A woman was in the unisex showers at her new gym when a man who had been talking to her about his marriage breakdown walks in. He obstructs her only exit and sexually assaults her
5. A woman was studying in the library when a man starts to tell her about how depressed he is since his business went bust. She listens to him and he asks her if she is single and when she tells him that she is not interested, he forces his hand up her top.

Subscale 6: Stereotypical offence situations

1. A beautiful woman with a curvaceous figure is on the tube when a man rubs his groin up against her
2. A woman who was wearing a clingy dress instead of the appropriate clothing in her community is raped on her way to a family gathering

3. A woman who makes a real effort with her appearance is suddenly pushed against a wall by a work colleague at a party who then kisses her
4. A woman is outside of her home when she is approached by a man in a car who stops to ask her for directions. As she gives the directions, she is dragged into the car by the man and then raped.
5. A woman had just finished an evening board meeting when she is knocked unconscious in a multi-storey carpark and is sexually assaulted

Subscale 7: She was a sexually active woman

1. A woman has been flirting with a man all night long. She is groped by him against her will as she tries to leave the club.
2. A woman chooses to go back to the hotel bar with a man she just met while out for the night. In the taxi on the way to the hotel, he forces his hand up her skirt even though she asked him not to.
3. A woman working in a brothel as a sex worker is forced to have anal sex by a client
4. A woman sends a lot of naked pictures and videos of herself to a guy she is dating from work. Using the pictures, he then blackmails her into kissing and masturbating him
5. A woman is forced to have sex with lots of men to pay off her drug debts
6. A woman who enjoys the attention she gets as a famous glamour model has her skirt lifted up and her vagina touched by a man in a restaurant
7. A woman who shot to fame as a reality TV star finds that the paparazzi have published up-skirt photos of her at an event
8. A woman makes a sex tape with her boyfriend but then finds out he's shared it with his mates without her knowing
9. A sex worker who only offers her clients a "hand job" or a "blow job" is forced to have vaginal sex with a client

Response items and participant scores for attributing blame

How much is the woman to blame for what happened?

Definitely not to blame	Probably not to blame	Probably to blame	Definitely to blame
Score 0	Score 1	Score 2	Score 3

How much is the man to blame for what happened?

Definitely not to blame	Probably not to blame	Probably to blame	Definitely to blame
Score 0	Score 1	Score 2	Score 3

Appendix 7

Kruskal Wallis Test Results: Comparing scores between sexes on BOWSVA subscales

Subscale	Sex	N	Mean Rank
1 Asking for it	F	247	206.58
	M	205	226.04
	Other	4	134.38
	Total	456	
2 Situation was dangerous	F	247	201.97
	M	205	227.79
	Other	4	161.50
	Total	456	
3 She should have been more assertive	F	247	220.78
	M	205	208.80
	Other	4	169.63
	Total	456	
4 He was entitled to her body	F	247	204
	M	205	229.84
	Other	4	144.0
	Total	456	
5: Non stereotypical offender	F	247	212.71
	M	205	214.98
	Other	4	190.0
	Total	456	
6: The stereotypical rape	F	247	214.30
	M	205	216.43
	Other	4	169.63
	Total	456	
7: She was a sexually active woman	F	247	207.18
	M	205	222.21
	Other	4	122.63
	Total	456	

Subscale	Chi Square	df	Asymp. Sig
1 Asking for it	4.817	2	.090
2 Situation was dangerous	9.421	2	.009
3 She should have been more assertive	1.615	2	.446
4 He was entitled to her body	8.290	2	.016
5 Non stereotypical offender	.617	2	.734
6 The stereotypical rape	.660	2	.660
7 She was a sexually active woman	4.012	2	.135

Appendix 8

Ethical approval confirmation for both qualitative studies 12/05/2017

Dear Jessica

Re: "Exploring the effect of victim blaming on the self-blame and re-victimisation of women who have experienced rape and sexual assault"
Application for Ethical Review ERN_17-0299

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project, which was reviewed by the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Ethical Review Committee.

On behalf of the Committee, I confirm that this study now has full ethical approval.

I would like to remind you that any substantive changes to the nature of the study as described in the Application for Ethical Review, and/or any adverse events occurring during the study should be promptly bought to the Committee's attention by the Principal Investigator and may necessitate further ethical review.

Please also ensure that the relevant requirements within the University's Code of Practice for Research and the information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages (available at https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Links-and-Resources.aspx) are adhered to and referred to in any future applications for ethical review. It is now a requirement on the revised application form (https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-Forms.aspx) to confirm that this guidance has been consulted and is understood, and that it has been taken into account when completing your application for ethical review.

Please be aware that whilst Health and Safety (H&S) issues may be considered during the ethical review process, you are still required to follow the University's guidance on H&S and to ensure that H&S risk assessments have been carried out as appropriate. For further information about this, please contact your School H&S representative or the University's H&S Unit athealthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

Kind regards

Susan Cottam
Research Ethics Officer
Research Support Group
C Block Dome
Aston Webb Building
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston B15 2TT
Tel: 0121 414 8825
Email: s.l.cottam@bham.ac.uk

Appendix 9

Recruitment poster for study with women subjected to sexual violence for display in rape centres and support services

Recruitment poster for study with professionals working with women for display in rape centres and support services

Appendix 10

Information sheet and consent form for study 2 with women subjected to sexual violence

You have been invited to take part in a study which aims to explore the impact of victim blaming and feelings of self-blame in women who have experienced sexual violence.

The study involves a confidential discussion with the researcher to discuss ideas, thoughts and theories about why women are blamed after they have experienced sexual violence and how that may impact on them. The answers given by you and other participants in the UK will be used to present evidence of the real experiences of victim blaming and self-blame following sexual violence so that recommendations can be made to improve practice and support for women in the future. You will not be asked to discuss or give any details about your history or experiences of sexual violence.

The discussions will be confidential and held in a private meeting room at CRASAC/RSVP/Rape Crisis. Each discussion will be recorded using a Dictaphone to enable the researcher to write up the content afterwards rather than making notes whilst you are speaking. The audio file will then be transcribed by the researcher and at this point, you will be given a pseudonym so you cannot be identified. To ensure that you feel that what you said was accurately transcribed and analysed, you will be able to view the analysis of your discussion and confirm that you are comfortable for it to be used. The audio file, (saved under your pseudonym) on the dictaphone will be deleted if you are happy with the transcript and the written transcript data is then stored for ten years on a password protected memory stick within the University of Birmingham for data protection and research integrity.

The results from this study will be used in the PhD Psychology thesis of the researcher, Jessica Eaton of the University of Birmingham and may therefore be published in other journals, presentations and spoken about at conferences. However, you will always remain anonymous and anything that is discussed that may identify you or others will be removed from the transcript.

The researcher is looking to speak to females aged 18 years old or over who have experienced sexual violence that occurred after the age of 13 years old. Sexual violence includes sexual harassment, sexual threats, sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, online sexual abuse and rape.

It is important that you understand your rights before you participate in the discussion, so please do read the full information sheet below:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary which means that you can choose not to participate, you can withdraw from this study part way through by asking for the discussion to end or you can contact the researcher to have your discussion transcript removed from the study.
- The researcher will meet with you for the discussion to take place which means you cannot be fully anonymous to the researcher. You will be asked for some basic demographic information such as your age, ethnicity, religion and your occupation so the researcher can be confident that the women who take part in this study represented as many different people as possible. Your location, name and any other identifying information will always remain anonymous when the research is

written up, published or spoken about. A false name will be used along with any comments that you made during the discussion.

- Once the discussions have been analysed and reported in the research, it will not be possible to remove your discussion so if you do change your mind and would like to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher before 1st Aug 2017.
- Taking part in this study means thinking and talking about potentially distressing and sensitive information relating to sexual offences committed against yourself and other women. The researcher will not ask any questions about the sexual violence you experienced but will be asking about your experiences of victim blaming and self-blame which may be sensitive. If you are currently seeking or receiving support for PTSD or any other trauma symptoms due to sexual violence, then this study may not be for you. Please take care of yourself by making a decision as to whether you would like to take part. The researcher would be happy to provide the questions that will be asked during the discussion so that you can make an informed choice about your own self-care.
- If the researcher has concerns that the study appears to be distressing you or that you are experiencing signs of trauma or it comes to light that you are currently accessing support for PTSD, the researcher may make the decision to stop the discussion for your safety and comfort.
- Whilst the discussion is confidential, this study complies with local safeguarding procedures and policies, meaning that sometimes confidentiality must be breached to protect children and adults from harm. The researcher is duty bound to share information from this discussion in which a child or adult is deemed to be at risk of or currently experiencing harm or committing harm against another. You will be advised if this is the case and you will be fully consulted before safeguarding concerns are shared.
- Self-care is important, which includes seeking further support if you find that you need to talk to someone about any of the issues raised in this study. There is a list of support agencies at the end of this information sheet but the staff members at CRASAC/RSVP/Rape Crisis have also offered to provide extra support if you need to talk to anyone after the discussion with the researcher. Your named contact for extra support is XXX
- You are welcome to request the results of this study and to read the final report when it is completed. If you would like to do so, you will be given the opportunity to leave an email address at the end of the discussion and the final research findings will be sent to CRASAC/RSVP/Rape Crisis.

Before, during or after your participation, you are welcome to contact the researcher or the supervisor of the researcher for further information or to ask questions about this study, the data and the publication.

Doctoral Researcher: Jessica Eaton – JEE509@bham.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr Jessica Woodhams –

If you have read the provided information and would like to take part, please indicate your consent below:

(Please write in block capitals)

☐ I have read all of the information about this study and I confirm that I would like to take part.

☐ I give consent for the recorded conversations that take place with the researcher to be used for research into victim blaming and self blame of women after they have experienced sexual violence.

☐ I understand that the recording and the transcript of the conversation with the researcher will be stored securely and safely on an encrypted memory stick for 10 years before they are deleted.

☐ I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study before, during or after the discussion with the researcher.

☐ I understand that I will not be asked any questions about my experiences of sexual violence

☐ I understand that I can access support after taking part in this study by talking to staff members at CRASAC/RSVP/Rape Crisis or by contacting an anonymous form of support such as the ones overleaf

Name:_____ Signature: _____

Date: _____ Contact Number: _____

Other sources of support

GALOP - 0800 999 5428 E: help@galop.org.uk (Emotional and practical support for LGBTQ+ people experiencing abuse)

Rape Crisis England and Wales - 0808 802 9999 www.rapecrisis.org.uk (Help if you've experienced rape, child sexual abuse and/or any kind of sexual violence)

NAPAC - 0808 801 0331 www.napac.org.uk (A national support helpline and website dedicated to adults who have experienced child abuse during their childhood)

Appendix 11

Semi-structured interview questions for women subjected to sexual violence

The researcher to explain the focus of the study again and to provide information about confidentiality, withdrawal and also explain:

Sexual violence includes sexual harassment, sexual threats, sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, online sexual abuse and rape.

	How do you think people react to women who have experienced sexual violence?
	How do you think women who have experienced sexual violence are blamed? - Can you give me some examples?
	Why do you think some people blame women who have experienced sexual violence?
	Did you experience any forms of victim blaming?
	How did that affect you?
	Do you think some women blame themselves after sexual violence?
	Why do you think women blame themselves for experiencing sexual violence?
	Did you blame yourself when you experienced sexual violence? (If yes, what do you think caused those feelings?)
	Do you think that being blamed by other people, or blaming themselves, means that a woman is more likely to experience sexual violence in the future?
	Is there anything else you would like to say?

Appendix 12

Participant recruitment guidance and checklist

Thank you for supporting my doctoral research into the victim blaming of women who have experienced sexual violence. This short guidance and checklist will help you to consider whether there are any clients who may not be suitable for this study or may need further support if they wish to take part. Please read through this guidance before recommending a client for this study. You do not need to submit this form to the researcher as it may contain confidential and protected information during your decision making process and discussions.

Concern	Guidance	Checklist/Action
Client is under eighteen	This study is not suitable for children under the age of 18 years old or adults with mental capacity of less than 18 years old.	Please do not recommend this client for this study
Client does not live in the UK	This study is not suitable for participants that do not live in the UK.	Please do not recommend this client for this study
Client has recently been raped (less than 2 months ago)	Current NICE guidelines recommend that people who have recently experienced a sexual trauma should not engage in detailed discussion for the first 6-8 weeks as this rehearsal can increase the likelihood complex trauma and PTSD.	Please do not recommend this client for this study
Client has recently been raped (less than 12 months but more than 2 months ago)	Whilst this group of people are not ruled out of this study, please discuss the nature of this study with them in detail and prepare extra support for them before, during and after the study is over.	☐ I have discussed the nature of the study with the client ☐ I have encouraged the client to request the study questions and information before taking part ☐ I have prepared extra support for this client within our organisation ☐ I have made the researcher aware
Client experienced historic or non-recent sexual violence and is part way through or ending therapy	This group of people are ideal for this study. Please discuss the nature of this study with them and discuss extra support that they feel they may need before, during and after the study is over.	☐ I have discussed the nature of the study with the client ☐ I have encouraged the client to request the study questions and information before taking part ☐ I have discussed extra support with the client
Client is waiting for a trial date related to the sexual violence	This group of people are not ruled out of this study but must be made aware that they cannot discuss evidence or the nature of the trial with the researcher. If the client expresses that they would want to talk about evidence or the trial/criminal justice system, this study may not be suitable at for them at this time.	☐ I have discussed the nature of the study with the client ☐ I have informed the client that the discussion of evidence or the trial must be avoided ☐ I have made the researcher aware OR ☐ I have not recommended

		this client for the study because they wanted to talk about evidence/trial
Client is currently self-harming as a coping mechanism (controlled)	This group of people are not ruled out of this study but extra support may be needed and the triggers for self-harming must be considered by the organisation. If blame, shame, doubt or disbelief are part of their triggers for self-harming, this study is not suitable for them. If their self-harming is a controlled coping mechanism and not related to the topic of study, please consider extra support.	☐ I have discussed the nature of the study with the client and it does not appear to be linked to their self-harm ☐ I have prepared further support for this client OR ☐ I have discussed/considered the triggers for this client and decided that the study is not suitable for them
Client is currently self-harming and it is not currently controlled or monitored	This group of people may be self-harming more frequently, using different strategies or are at a higher risk than other people who use self-harm as a controlled coping mechanism. If their self-harming is resulting in frequent serious implications requiring medical or psychiatric attention, this study is not suitable for them at this time.	Please do not recommend this client for this study. Follow your internal safeguarding procedures.
Client is currently known to be suicidal or has made a recent suicide attempt	This group of people may be currently known to be at high risk of suicidal thoughts or suicidal actions/behaviours. They may talk about wanting to end their life or tell you that they plan to end their life. These clients are at significant risk and this study is not suitable for them at this time.	Please do not recommend this client for study. Follow your internal safeguarding procedures.
Client does not want to participate in this study	Everyone has the choice to take part or not and no one is under any pressure at all. Their consideration to take part is appreciated.	Please advise this client that they are free to make this choice and that participation is completely voluntary.
Client is unsure of whether they want to take part	Everyone has the choice to take part or not and no one is under any pressure at all. They may need further information or would benefit from asking questions to the researcher. Contact Jessica Eaton JEE509@bham.ac.uk with your client or on their behalf, to ask any questions. Consider asking for the interview questions in advance so that the client can think about any that they would prefer not to answer.	☐ I have discussed the study with the client and assured them that their participation is voluntary ☐ I have asked the client what further information they need about the study ☐ I have given the client the researcher's contact details/we contacted the researcher together
Client cannot consent to the study due to capacity of mind concerns	This group of people may not be able to take part in this study as they cannot freely give informed consent about the nature and topic of this research.	Please do not recommend this client for study. Please discuss this with the researcher and supervisor.

Please note that this form is for guidance only and must not be used in place of your internal risk assessments of clients. This form is for use by professionals who are responding to enquiries from clients about whether they should take part in this study or not. If you have

any queries, please talk to your line manager and the researcher, Jessica Eaton on JEE509@bham.ac.uk

Appendix 13

Study 2 (Women) debrief sheet

Thank you for taking part in this study. This information sheet offers further information about the background to this research. The study you have just assisted with aims to speak to a number of women who have experienced sexual violence about their views on victim blaming and self-blame of themselves and other women.

Sexual assault, abuse and rape are common experiences of women all over the world. Unfortunately, it is equally common for women to experience victim blaming from their loved ones, their peer group and from professional bodies such as the police and the health services they approach. It can also be a common reaction to blame themselves for what happened.

The overall aim of this study is to look at whether women who were blamed by other people take these comments on board and start to blame themselves for the sexual violence. Secondly, the study looks at whether women who blame themselves or have been blamed by others may remain vulnerable to further sexual violence in the future.

This study is being carried out with around 10 women who have experienced sexual violence and around 10 professionals who support those women. When all of the transcript data is collated together and analysed, it will provide a unique picture of the experiences of victim blaming and self-blame from women and professionals in the UK. The findings will be used to make practice, policy or societal recommendations to reduce victim blaming and self-blame and to ensure that women who experience sexual violence are supported in the best way possible.

No matter what your answers were, you have contributed to an important study of the attitudes towards and responses to victims of sexual violence in the UK – and from all of the answers, we can work to understand the reasons why people may blame a victim and how we can support them more effectively.

Thank you for your time and thoughts today.

If you do need further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

The results from this study will be used in the PhD Psychology thesis of Jessica Eaton of the University of Birmingham and may therefore be published in other journals, presentations and spoken about at conferences.

Please remember these important points from the information sheet:

- Once the transcripts from this study have been analysed and reported, it will not be possible to remove your answers so if you do change your mind and would like to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher before 1st Aug 2017. If you would like to withdraw from this study, please contact Jessica Eaton at JEE509@bham.ac.uk or you can contact Dr Jessica Woodhams by leaving a message on the voicemail system of [redacted]. You can also write a letter and send it to Dr Jessica Woodhams and Jessica Eaton, School of Psychology, Frankland Building, Edgbaston Campus, University of Birmingham, B15 2TT.
- You are welcome to request the results of this study and to read the final report when it is completed. If you would like to do so, you will be given the opportunity to leave an email address at the end of the discussion.

- You are able to read the analysis of your discussion so you can confirm that you are comfortable with the accuracy of analysis and comments made by the researcher. If you would like to take part in this, please leave your name, number and email address with the researcher.

You are welcome to contact the researcher or the supervisor of the researcher for further information or to ask questions about this study, the data and the publication.

Doctoral Researcher: Jessica Eaton – JEE509@bham.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr Jessica Woodhams – [redacted]

Sources of Support

Your main source of support are the staff members at your support organisation, who have agreed to support you during and after this study. However, if you would like to talk to someone else, here are a few suggestions:

GALOP - 0800 999 5428 E: help@galop.org.uk (Emotional and practical support for LGBTQ+ people experiencing abuse)

Rape Crisis England and Wales - 0808 802 9999 www.rapecrisis.org.uk (Help if you've experienced rape, child sexual abuse and/or any kind of sexual violence)

Survivors UK Webchat – www.survivorsuk.org (a web chat service for men who have experienced sexual violence)

NAPAC - 0808 801 0331 www.napac.org.uk (A national support helpline and website dedicated to adults who have experienced child abuse during their childhood)

Appendix 14

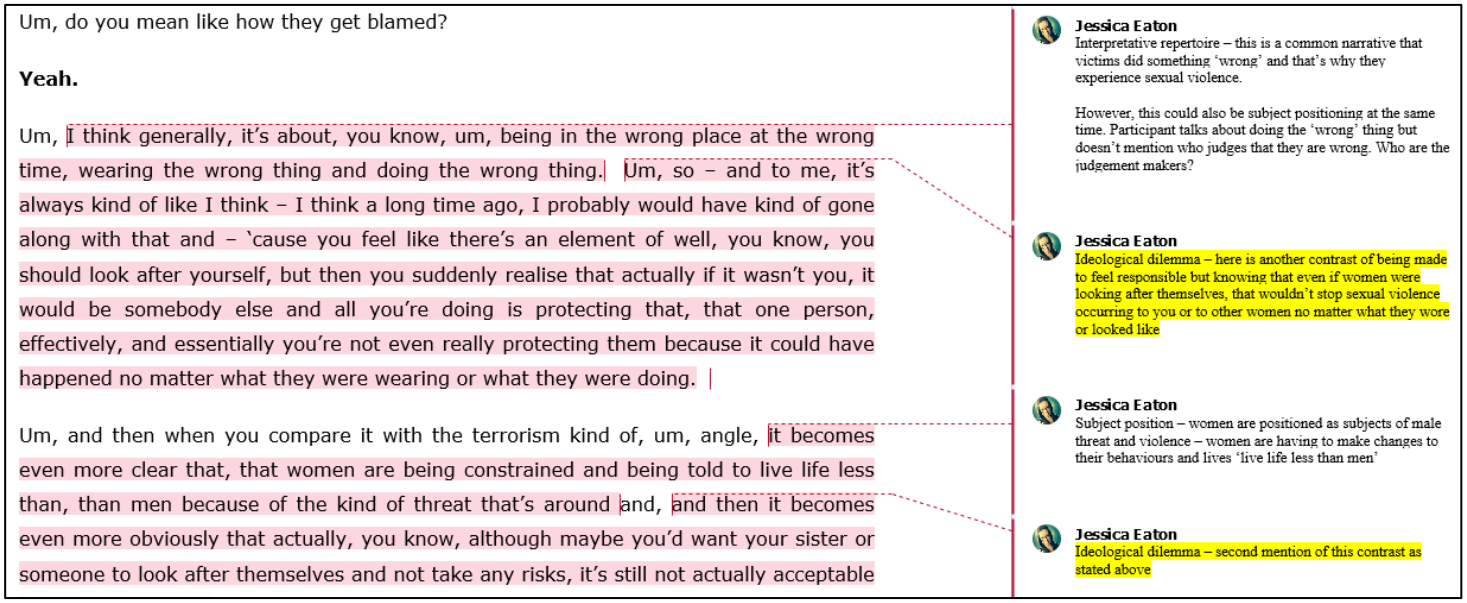
Analytic steps taken to transcribe and analyse the data

Data in the two qualitative studies was transcribed and analysed in the same way, following the same principles and steps. This section will provide a description of the steps, along with examples of the critical discursive analysis at each stage.

1. The audio recorded interviews were transcribed in full, including 'fillers' such as 'um', 'uh', 'like' and 'hm'. At the point of transcription, names were changed to pseudonyms and references to places, venues or identifiable data was redacted.

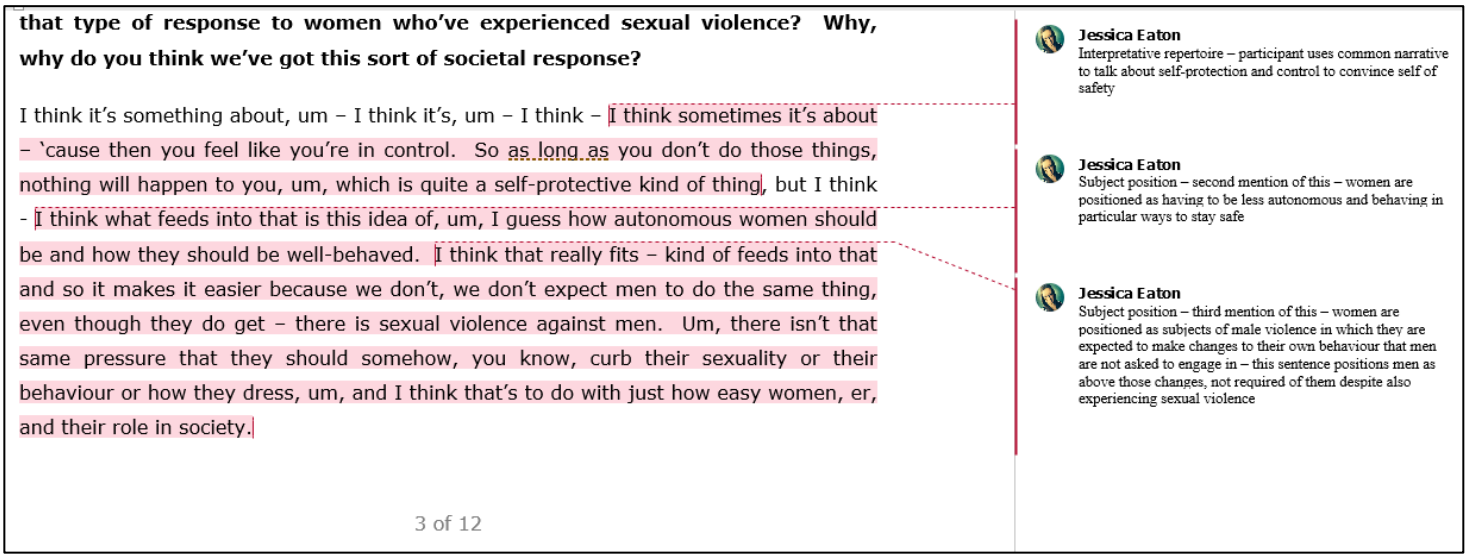
2. Transcripts were read twice each, without any interpretation or analysis to familiarise myself with the data again before analysis

3. Transcripts were annotated with ideas of interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions in the language.



4. Annotation was checked with a second coder who was experienced in qualitative methods (PhD supervisor) to check for accuracy of interpretation and analysis. Interpretation and analysis was found to be accurate and there were no differences of analysis or interpretation of the discursive tools I had identified.

5. Transcripts were analysed a second time, this time looking for patterns or recurring themes within and between participants.



that type of response to women who've experienced sexual violence? Why, why do you think we've got this sort of societal response?

I think it's something about, um – I think it's, um – I think – I think sometimes it's about – 'cause then you feel like you're in control. So as long as you don't do those things, nothing will happen to you, um, which is quite a self-protective kind of thing, but I think - I think what feeds into that is this idea of, um, I guess how autonomous women should be and how they should be well-behaved. I think that really fits – kind of feeds into that and so it makes it easier because we don't, we don't expect men to do the same thing, even though they do get – there is sexual violence against men. Um, there isn't that same pressure that they should somehow, you know, curb their sexuality or their behaviour or how they dress, um, and I think that's to do with just how easy women, er, and their role in society.

3 of 12

Jessica Eaton
Interpretative repertoire – participant uses common narrative to talk about self-protection and control to convince self of safety

Jessica Eaton
Subject position – second mention of this – women are positioned as having to be less autonomous and behaving in particular ways to stay safe

Jessica Eaton
Subject position – third mention of this – women are positioned as subjects of male violence in which they are expected to make changes to their own behaviour that men are not asked to engage in – this sentence positions men as above those changes, not required of them despite also experiencing sexual violence

6. A second document was created to contain a framework of proposed themes, evidence of direct quotes from the transcripts, notes and frequencies to identify key themes. In this document, all themes identified in all transcripts was included. There were no exclusions or removals at this stage.

Discursive Tool	Theme	Examples from data
Interpretative repertoire	Common rape myths such as she asked for it, what she was wearing, whether she was drinking, whether she fought him off, whether she said 'no' clearly enough, flirting, body shape, beauty, the way you look attracts rapists and abusive men, the victim is bad or flawed, rapes are all violent and include violent injury or fighting, victims report to police if the rape is true **23 occurrences of this theme in conversation** **7 out of 10 participants references this theme** **46 individual speech examples**	AMY: 'Um, but yeah, I think that's the ultimate thing they think, is like, oh, they must be dirty, or they flaunt themselves, or— I don't know. From my experience, yeah, I think that's, that's what I think people think.' AMY: But, um, they, like, say, oh, it's how they've dressed, or it's cos they wear too much makeup, cos they're overconfident and they're quite flirtatious. Um, yeah, I'd say that's what people think (laughs).' Amy: 'Why do they blame themselves? I don't know. I personally think, from my experience, because, um, I was held down, I think it's kinda my fault because I wasn't strong enough.' AMY: 'Um, so yeah, I think, er, we blame ourselves for strength, like lack of strength. From my experience, strength, um, body size maybe, how I look, maybe too confident, I think that might've attracted the wrong people and— I don't know. Like they're the only ones that can think of.' JANE: 'It's more of a, erm, you know, "You could have led them on," or "You got drunk," or, "It's not their fault, how were they to know?" Or, "They couldn't control themselves because of what you were wearing.' DEMI: And, um, (pause) I think people expect you, there's this expectation that you'll (pause) be, um – respond in a certain way, not keep going back to an abusive relationship or not relive it, but kind of be quiet and frightened and, um, (pause) I don't know, cry all the time . DEMI: You know, from what I can see from other people, it is, um, obviously the what you're wearing and what you're drinking and walking home late at night

7. The document was sent to the second coder again (PhD supervisor) for comments on whether the themes being identified were being securely evidenced by the quotes taken from the transcripts, and whether any themes were being too far inferred or implied. Evidence was found to be straight forward and clear.

8. A third document was created to summarise the most salient themes, categorised into subject positions, interpretative repertoires and ideological dilemmas. Themes that were only discussed by a couple of participants or were not directly related to self-blame or victim blaming of women were removed from further analysis. The themes that were most frequently cited, by the most participants and were considered central to the understanding of victim blaming and self-blame of women were included. At the bottom of each document, any overlapping or interlinking of themes or discursive tools was noted so as not to duplicate or miss connections between the themes. Some themes at this point were merged into one larger issue as the talk was so interlinked.

Analysis revealed ideological dilemmas, subject positioning and interpretative repertoires – however some of these overlapped and linked to each other. The table below briefly describes the most dominant themes, their discursive tool and some core stats of prevalence and usage in the speech. Larger examples of conversation and stories containing the highlighted fragments of speech and discourse are in another document due to the size of the available corpus.

Theme	Frequency	Type	Rank
Rape myths	46 individual speech examples 23 occurrences in conversation Used by 70% of participants	Interpretative repertoire	1
Women are responsible for men's behaviours	30 individual speech examples 19 occurrences in conversation Used by 60% of participants	Subject positioning of women	4
Women are judged more harshly than men in society	22 individual speech examples 12 occurrences Used by 50% of participants	Subject positioning of women	8
Knowing it is wrong but not being able to assert herself to stop it (positioning self as unable to assert or influence)	34 individual speech examples 29 individual speech examples 20 occurrences Used by 40% of participants	Ideological dilemma AND subject positioning of the woman	3
Women should change something about themselves to stop rape happening to them again (but knowing it won't or can't protect them)	22 individual speech examples 24 individual speech examples 21 occurrences Used by 60% of participants	Interpretative repertoire AND Ideological dilemma	2

9. The final themes to be presented in the studies were then sent to both PhD supervisors (including the second coder) for any comments. No changes were made to the themes at this stage and no issues were reported by second coder.

Appendix 15

Information sheet and consent form for Study 3 with professionals

You have been invited to take part in a study which aims to explore the impact of victim blaming and feelings of self-blame in women who have experienced sexual violence and how professionals are currently working to support them with these experiences.

The study involves a confidential discussion with the researcher to discuss ideas, thoughts and theories about why women are blamed after they have experienced sexual violence and how that may impact on them. In addition, the discussion will include questions about how professionals respond to and challenge victim blaming and self-blame with their clients. The answers given by you and other participants in the UK will be used to present evidence of the real experiences of victim blaming and self-blame following sexual violence and evidence of how professionals currently respond to victim blaming and feelings of self-blame so that recommendations can be made to improve practice and support for women in the future.

The discussions will be confidential and held in a private meeting room at CRASAC/RSVP/Rape Crisis. Each discussion will be recorded using a Dictaphone to enable the researcher to write up the content afterwards rather than making notes whilst you are speaking. The audio file will then be transcribed by the researcher and at this point, you will be given a pseudonym so you cannot be identified. To ensure that you feel that what you said was accurately transcribed and analysed, you will be able to view the analysis of your discussion and confirm that you are comfortable for it to be used. The audio file, (saved under your pseudonym) on the dictaphone will be deleted if you are happy with the transcript and the written transcript data is then stored for ten years on a password protected memory stick within the University of Birmingham for data protection and research integrity.

The results from this study will be used in the PhD Psychology thesis of the researcher, Jessica Eaton of the University of Birmingham and may therefore be published in other journals, presentations and spoken about at conferences. However, you will always remain anonymous and anything that is discussed that may identify you or others will be removed from the transcript.

The researcher is looking to speak to male and female professionals aged 18 years old or over who work with women affected by sexual violence. Sexual violence includes sexual harassment, sexual threats, sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, online sexual abuse and rape.

It is important that you understand your rights before you participate in the study, so please do read the full information sheet below:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary which means that you can choose not to participate, you can withdraw from this study part way through by asking for the discussion to end or you can contact the researcher to have your discussion transcript removed from the study.
- The researcher will meet with you for the discussion to take place which means you cannot be fully anonymous to the researcher. You will be asked for some basic demographic information such as your age, ethnicity, religion and your role type so the researcher can be confident that the professionals who take part in this study were as diverse as possible. Your location, organisation, your name and any other identifying information will always remain anonymous when the research is written

up, published or spoken about. A false name will be used along with any comments that you made during the discussion.

- Once the discussions have been analysed and reported in the research, it will not be possible to remove your discussion so if you do change your mind and would like to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher before 1st Aug 2017.
- Taking part in this study means thinking and talking about potentially distressing and sensitive information relating to sexual offences committed against women. The researcher will not ask any questions about the sexual violence your clients have experienced but will be asking about their experiences of victim blaming and self-blame which may be sensitive.
- If you are currently the subject of safeguarding investigations about your practice or casework or have been banned from working with children or adults, unfortunately this study is not suitable for you.
- Whilst the discussion is confidential, this study complies with local safeguarding procedures and policies, meaning that sometimes confidentiality must be breached to protect children and adults from harm. The researcher is duty bound to share information from this discussion in which a child or adult is deemed to be at risk of or currently experiencing harm or committing harm against another. You will be advised if this is the case and you will be fully consulted before safeguarding concerns are shared.
- If you are currently seeking or receiving support for PTSD or any other trauma symptoms including vicarious trauma and burnout, then this study may not be for you. Please take care of yourself by making a decision as to whether you would like to take part. The researcher is happy to provide the questions that will be asked during the discussion so that you can make an informed choice about your own self-care.
- If the researcher has concerns that the study appears to be distressing you or that you are experiencing signs of vicarious trauma or it comes to light that you are currently the subject of safeguarding investigations or have been banned from working with children or adults, the researcher may make the decision to stop the discussion for your safety and comfort.
- Self-care is important, which includes seeking further support if you find that you need to talk to someone about any of the issues raised in this study. There is a list of support agencies at the end of this information sheet but your organisation has also offered to provide extra support if you need to talk to anyone after the discussion with the researcher. If you do need to talk to someone, your named contact within your organisation is XXX.
- You are welcome to request the results of this study and to read the final report when it is completed. If you would like to do so, you will be given the opportunity to leave an email address at the end of the discussion and the final research findings will be sent to CRASAC/RSVP/Rape Crisis.

Before, during or after your participation, you are welcome to contact the researcher or the supervisor of the researcher for further information or to ask questions about this study, the data and the publication.

Doctoral Researcher: Jessica Eaton – JEE509@bham.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr Jessica Woodhams –

If you have read the provided information and would like to take part, please indicate your consent below:

(Please write in block capitals)

☐ I have read all of the information about this study and I confirm that I would like to take part.

☐ I give consent for the recorded conversations that take place with the researcher to be used for research into victim blaming and self blame of women after they have experienced sexual violence.

☐ I understand that the recording and the transcript of the conversation with the researcher will be stored securely and safely on an encrypted memory stick for 10 years before they are deleted.

☐ I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study before, during or after the discussion with the researcher.

☐ I understand that I can access support after taking part in this study by talking to staff members at CRASAC/RSVP/Rape Crisis or by contacting an anonymous form of support such as the ones overleaf

☐ I understand that the discussions are confidential and that I will be anonymised in the report arising from this study

Name:_____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

To enable the researcher to arrange a time to talk to you, you can leave one or both contact options:

Contact Number: _____

Email address: _____

Other sources of support

GALOP - 0800 999 5428 E: help@galop.org.uk (Emotional and practical support for LGBTQ+ people experiencing abuse)

Rape Crisis England and Wales - 0808 802 9999 www.rapecrisis.org.uk (Help if you've experienced rape, child sexual abuse and/or any kind of sexual violence)

NAPAC - 0808 801 0331 www.napac.org.uk (A national support helpline and website dedicated to adults who have experienced child abuse during their childhood)

Appendix 16

Semi-structured interview questions for professionals working in sexual violence

The researcher to explain the focus of the study, withdrawal, self-care, confidentiality and then explain:

Sexual violence includes sexual harassment, sexual threats, sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, online sexual abuse and rape.

	How do you think society responds to women who have experienced sexual violence?
	Do you think women who have experienced sexual violence are blamed? - In what ways are they blamed?
	What does the term 'victim blaming' mean to you?
	Why do you think women who have experienced sexual violence are blamed in our society?
	Have you supported women who have experienced victim blaming by others and if so, can you give some examples of how they talk about their experiences of victim blaming?
	How do you think victim blaming impacted on them?
	Have you supported women who have experienced self-blame after sexual violence and if so, can you give some examples of how they talk about blaming themselves?
	How do you tackle the issue of victim blaming and self-blame when a client blames herself for sexual violence?
	Do you think it is possible to break down victim blaming messages with your clients?
	How do you currently try to break down messages of victim blaming that your clients have accepted as true?
	Do you think that women who have experienced sexual violence and victim blaming (or self-blame) are more likely to experience sexual violence in the future? - Do you think it changes the way they think/act/behave? - How could it influence revictimisation?
	Is there anything else you would like to say?

Appendix 17

Study 3 (Professionals) debrief sheet

Thank you for taking part in this study. This information sheet offers further information about the background to this research. The study you have just assisted with aims to speak to several professionals who work with women who have experienced sexual violence about their views on victim blaming and self-blame. The study also explores at your tools, techniques and approaches to victim blaming and self-blame when your clients discuss it with you.

Sexual assault, abuse and rape are common experiences of women all over the world. Unfortunately, it is equally common for women to experience victim blaming from their loved ones, their peer group and from professional bodies such as the police and the health services they approach. It can also be a common reaction to blame themselves for what happened.

The overall aim of this study is to look at whether women who were blamed by other people take these comments on board and start to blame themselves for the sexual violence. Secondly, the study looks at whether women who blame themselves or have been blamed by others may remain vulnerable to further sexual violence in the future. Thirdly, the study explores how professionals talk to their clients about victim blaming and feelings of self blame as there is no research which provides accounts of professionals who are working to challenge victim blaming and to reduce feelings of self blame.

This study is being carried out with around 10 women who have experienced sexual violence and around 10 professionals who support those women. When all of the transcript data is collated together and analysed, it will provide a unique picture of the experiences of victim blaming and self-blame from women and professionals in the UK. The findings will be used to make practice, policy or societal recommendations to reduce victim blaming and self-blame and to ensure that women who experience sexual violence are supported in the best way possible.

No matter what your answers were, you have contributed to an important study of the attitudes towards and responses to victims of sexual violence in the UK – and from all of the answers, we can work to understand the reasons why people may blame a victim and how we can support them more effectively.

Thank you for your time and thoughts today.

If you do need further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

The results from this study will be used in the PhD Psychology thesis of Jessica Eaton of the University of Birmingham and may therefore be published in other journals, presentations and spoken about at conferences.

Please remember these important points from the information sheet:

- Once the transcripts from this study have been analysed and reported, it will not be possible to remove your answers so if you do change your mind and would like to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher before 1st Aug 2017. If you would like to withdraw from this study, please contact Jessica Eaton at JEE509@bham.ac.uk or you can contact Dr Jessica Woodhams by leaving a message on the voicemail system of [redacted]. You can also write a letter and

send it to Jessica Eaton/Dr Jessica Woodhams, School of Psychology, Frankland Building, Edgbaston Campus, University of Birmingham B15 2TT

- You are welcome to request the results of this study and to read the final report when it is completed. If you would like to do so, you will be given the opportunity to leave an email address at the end of the discussion.
- You are able to read the analysis of your discussion so you can confirm that you are comfortable with the accuracy of analysis and comments made by the researcher. If you would like to take part in this, please leave your name, number and email address with the researcher.

You are welcome to contact the researcher or the supervisor of the researcher for further information or to ask questions about this study, the data and the publication.

Doctoral Researcher: Jessica Eaton – JEE509@bham.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr Jessica Woodhams –

Sources of Support

GALOP - 0800 999 5428 E: help@galop.org.uk (Emotional and practical support for LGBTQ+ people experiencing abuse)

Rape Crisis England and Wales - 0808 802 9999 www.rapecrisis.org.uk (Help if you've experienced rape, child sexual abuse and/or any kind of sexual violence)

Survivors UK Webchat – www.survivorsuk.org (a web chat service for men who have experienced sexual violence)

NAPAC - 0808 801 0331 www.napac.org.uk (A national support helpline and website dedicated to adults who have experienced child abuse during their childhood)